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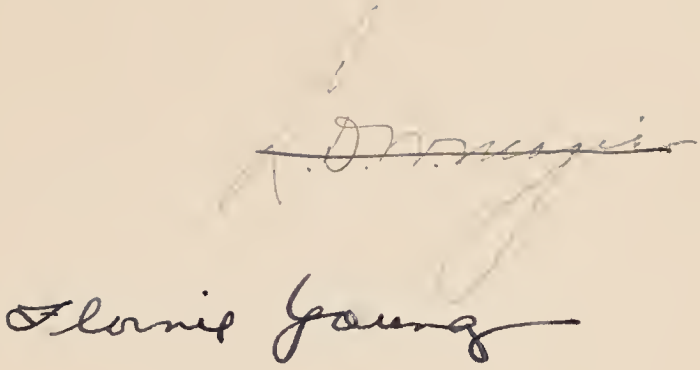

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MY CHILDHOOD

"Aleksyei Maksimovitch Pyeshkof (pseudonym Maxim Gorky). Born at Nijni-Novgorod, March 14, 1868. He led a vagabond life for many years, working and tramping with the poorest classes in Russia, and his writings record the tragedy of poverty and crime as he found it. Among the best known of his works are 'Makar Chudra' (1890), 'Emilian Pibgai,' 'Chelkash,' 'Oshybka' (1895), 'Tyenovya Kartinki' (1895), 'Toska,' 'Konovalov' (1896), 'Malva' (1896), 'Foma Gordyeev' (1901), 'Mukiki' (1901). Three volumes of short stories (1898–99), 'Miestchanye' (1902), 'Comrades' (1907), 'The Spy' (1908), 'In the Depths,' a play, and 'Tales of Two Countries' (1914)." —*Century Cyclopedia of Names.*

MY CHILDHOOD

BY

MAXIM GORKY

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MY CHILDHOOD

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CHAPTER I

IN a narrow, darkened room, my father, dressed in a white and unusually long garment, lay on the floor under the window. The toes of his bare feet were curiously extended, and the fingers of the still hands, which rested peacefully upon his breast, were curved; his merry eyes were tightly closed by the black disks of two copper coins; the light had gone out of his still face, and I was frightened by the ugly way he showed his teeth.

My mother, only half clad in a red petticoat, knelt and combed my father's long, soft hair, from his brow to the nape of his neck, with the same black comb which I loved to use to tear the rind of watermelons; she talked unceasingly in her low, husky voice, and it seemed as if her swollen eyes must be washed away by the incessant flow of tears.

Holding me by the hand was my grandmother, who had a big, round head, large eyes, and a nose like a

sponge—a dark, tender, wonderfully interesting person. She also was weeping, and her grief formed a fitting accompaniment to my mother's, as, shuddering the while, she pushed me towards my father; but I, terrified and uneasy, obstinately tried to hide myself against her. I had never seen grown-up people cry before, and I did not understand the words which my grandmother uttered again and again:

"Say good-by to daddy. You will never see him any more. He is dead—before his time."

I had been very ill, had only just left my bed in fact, and I remember perfectly well that at the beginning of my illness my father used to merrily bustle about me. Then he suddenly disappeared and his place was taken by my grandmother, a stranger to me.

"Where did you come from?" I asked her.

"From up there, from Nijni," she answered; "but I did not walk here, I came by boat. One does not walk on water, you little imp."

This was ludicrous, incomprehensible, and untrue; upstairs there lived a bearded, gaudy Persian, and in the cellar an old, yellow Kalmuck who sold sheepskins. One could get upstairs by riding on the banisters, or if one fell that way, one could roll. I knew this by experience. But where was there room for water? It was all untrue and delightfully muddled.

"And why am I a little imp?"

"Why? Because you are so noisy," she said, laughing.

She spoke sweetly, merrily, melodiously, and from the very first day I made friends with her; all I wanted now was for her to make haste and take me out of that room.

My mother pressed me to her; her tears and groans created in me a strange feeling of disquietude. It was the first time I had seen her like this. She had always appeared a stern woman of few words; neat, glossy, and strongly built like a horse, with a body of almost savage strength, and terribly strong arms. But now she was swollen and palpitating, and utterly desolate. Her hair, which was always coiled so neatly about her head, with her large, gaily trimmed cap, was tumbled about her bare shoulders, fell over her face, and part of it which remained plaited, trailed across my father's sleeping face. Although I had been in the room a long time she had not once looked at me; she could do nothing but dress my father's hair, sobbing and choking with tears the while.

Presently some swarthy gravediggers and a soldier peeped in at the door.

The latter shouted angrily:

"Clear out now! Hurry up!"

The window was curtained by a dark shawl, which the wind inflated like a sail. I knew this because one

day my father had taken me out in a sailing-boat, and without warning there had come a peal of thunder. He laughed, and holding me against his knees, cried, "It is nothing. Don't be frightened, Luke!"

Suddenly my mother threw herself heavily on the floor, but almost at once turned over on her back, dragging her hair in the dust; her impassive, white face had become livid, and showing her teeth like my father, she said in a terrible voice, "Close the door! . . . Alexis . . . go away!"

Thrusting me on one side, grandmother rushed to the door crying:

"Friends! Don't be frightened; don't interfere, but go away, for the love of Christ. This is not cholera but childbirth. . . . I beg of you to go, good people!"

I hid myself in a dark corner behind a box, and thence I saw how my mother writhed upon the floor, panting and gnashing her teeth; and grandmother, kneeling beside her, talked lovingly and hopefully.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son . . . ! Be patient, Varusha! Holy Mother of God! . . . Our Defense . . . !"

I was terrified. They crept about on the floor close to my father, touching him, groaning and shrieking, and he remained unmoved and actually smiling. This creeping about on the floor lasted a long time; several

times my mother stood up, only to fall down again, and grandmother rolled in and out of the room like a large, black, soft ball. All of a sudden a child cried.

"Thank God!" said grandmother. "It is a boy!" And she lighted a candle.

I must have fallen asleep in the corner, for I remember nothing more.

The next impression which my memory retains is a deserted corner in a cemetery on a rainy day. I am standing by a slippery mound of sticky earth and looking into the pit wherein they have thrown the coffin of my father. At the bottom there is a quantity of water, and there are also frogs, two of which have even jumped on to the yellow lid of the coffin.

At the graveside were myself, grandmother, a drenched sexton, and two cross gravediggers with shovels.

We were all soaked with the warm rain which fell in fine drops like glass beads.

"Fill in the grave," commanded the sexton, moving away.

Grandmother began to cry, covering her face with a corner of the shawl which she wore for a head-covering. The gravediggers, bending nearly double, began to fling the lumps of earth on the coffin rapidly, striking the frogs, which were leaping against the sides of the pit, down to the bottom.

"Come along, Lenia," said grandmother, taking hold of my shoulder; but having no desire to depart, I wriggled out of her hands.

"What next, O Lord?" grumbled grandmother, partly to me, and partly to God, and she remained for some time silent, with her head drooping dejectedly.

The grave was filled in, yet still she stood there, till the gravediggers threw their shovels to the ground with a resounding clangor, and a breeze suddenly arose and died away, scattering the raindrops; then she took me by the hand and led me to a church some distance away, by a path which lay between a number of dark crosses.

"Why don't you cry?" she asked, as we came away from the burial-ground. "You ought to cry."

"I don't want to," was my reply.

"Well, if you don't want to, you need not," she said gently.

This greatly surprised me, because I seldom cried, and when I did it was more from anger than sorrow; moreover, my father used to laugh at my tears, while my mother would exclaim, "Don't you dare to cry!"

After this we rode in a droshky through a broad but squalid street, between rows of houses which were painted dark red.

As we went along, I asked grandmother, "Will those frogs ever be able to get out?"

"Never!" she answered. "God bless them!"

I reflected that my father and my mother never spoke so often or so familiarly of God.

. . . . . .

A few days later my mother and grandmother took me aboard a steamboat, where we had a tiny cabin.

My little brother Maxim was dead, and lay on a table in the corner, wrapped in white and wound about with red tape. Climbing on to the bundles and trunks I looked out of the porthole, which seemed to me exactly like the eye of a horse. Muddy, frothy water streamed unceasingly down the pane. Once it dashed against the glass with such violence that it splashed me, and I involuntarily jumped back to the floor.

"Don't be afraid," said grandmother, and lifting me lightly in her kind arms, restored me to my place on the bundles.

A gray, moist fog brooded over the water; from time to time a shadowy land was visible in the distance, only to be obscured again by the fog and the foam. Everything about us seemed to vibrate, except my mother who, with her hands folded behind her head, leaned against the wall fixed and still, with a face that was grim and hard as iron, and as expressionless. Standing thus, mute, with closed eyes, she appeared to

me as an absolute stranger. Her very frock was unfamiliar to me.

More than once grandmother said to her softly, "Varia, won't you have something to eat?"

My mother neither broke the silence nor stirred from her position.

Grandmother spoke to me in whispers, but to my mother she spoke aloud, and at the same time cautiously and timidly, and very seldom. I thought she was afraid of her, which was quite intelligible, and seemed to draw us closer together.

"Saratov!" loudly and fiercely exclaimed my mother with startling suddenness. "Where is the sailor?"

Strange, new words to me! Saratov? Sailor?

A broad-shouldered, gray-headed individual dressed in blue now entered, carrying a small box which grandmother took from him, and in which she proceeded to place the body of my brother. Having done this she bore the box and its burden to the door on her outstretched hands; but, alas! being so stout she could only get through the narrow doorway of the cabin sideways, and now halted before it in ludicrous uncertainty.

"Really, Mama!" exclaimed my mother impatiently, taking the tiny coffin from her. Then they both disappeared, while I stayed behind in the cabin regarding the man in blue.

"Well, mate, so the little brother has gone?" he said, bending down to me.

"Who are you?"

"I am a sailor."

"And who is Saratov?"

"Saratov is a town. Look out of the window. There it is!"

Observed from the window, the land seemed to oscillate; and revealing itself obscurely and in a fragmentary fashion, as it lay steaming in the fog, it reminded me of a large piece of bread just cut off a hot loaf.

"Where has grandmother gone to?"

"To bury her little grandson."

"Are they going to bury him in the ground?"

"Yes, of course they are."

I then told the sailor about the live frogs that had been buried with my father.

He lifted me up, and hugging and kissing me, cried, "Oh, my poor little fellow, you don't understand. It is not the frogs who are to be pitied, but your mother. Think how she is bowed down by her sorrow."

Then came a resounding howl overhead. Having already learned that it was the steamer which made this noise, I was not afraid; but the sailor hastily set me down on the floor and darted away, exclaiming, "I must run!"

The desire to escape seized me. I ventured out of the door. The dark, narrow space outside was empty, and not far away shone the brass on the steps of the staircase. Glancing upwards, I saw people with wallets and bundles in their hands, evidently going off the boat. This meant that I must go off too.

But when I appeared in front of the gangway, amidst the crowd of peasants, they all began to yell at me.

"Who does he belong to? Who do you belong to?"

No one knew.

For a long time they jostled and shook and poked me about, until the gray-haired sailor appeared and seized me, with the explanation:

"It is the Astrakhan boy from the cabin."

And he ran off with me to the cabin, deposited me on the bundles and went away, shaking his finger at me, as he threatened, "I 'll give you something!"

The noise overhead became less and less. The boat had ceased to vibrate, or to be agitated by the motion of the water. The window of the cabin was shut in by damp walls; within it was dark, and the air was stifling. It seemed to me that the very bundles grew larger and began to press upon me; it was all horrible, and I began to wonder if I was going to be left alone forever in that empty boat.

I went to the door, but it would not open; the brass handle refused to turn, so I took a bottle of milk and with all my force struck at it. The only result was that the bottle broke and the milk spilled over my legs, and trickled into my boots. Crushed by this failure, I threw myself on the bundles crying softly, and so fell asleep.

When I awoke the boat was again in motion, and the window of the cabin shone like the sun.

Grandmother, sitting near me, was combing her hair and muttering something with knitted brow. She had an extraordinary amount of hair which fell over her shoulders and breast to her knees, and even touched the floor. It was blue-black. Lifting it up from the floor with one hand and holding it with difficulty, she introduced an almost toothless wooden comb into its thick strands. Her lips were twisted, her dark eyes sparkled fiercely, while her face, encircled in that mass of hair, looked comically small. Her expression was almost malignant, but when I asked her why she had such long hair she answered in her usual mellow, tender voice:

"Surely God gave it to me as a punishment. . . . Even when it is combed, just look at it! . . . When I was young I was proud of my mane, but now I am old I curse it. But you go to sleep. It is quite early. The sun has only just risen."

"But I don't want to go to sleep again."

"Very well, then don't go to sleep," she agreed at once, plaiting her hair and glancing at the berth on which my mother lay rigid, with upturned face. "How did you smash that bottle last evening? Tell me about it quietly."

So she always talked, using such peculiarly harmonious words that they took root in my memory like fragrant, bright, everlasting flowers. When she smiled the pupils of her dark, luscious eyes dilated and beamed with an inexpressible charm, and her strong white teeth gleamed cheerfully. Apart from her multitudinous wrinkles and her swarthy complexion, she had a youthful and brilliant appearance. What spoiled her was her bulbous nose, with its distended nostrils, and red lips, caused by her habit of taking pinches of snuff from her black snuff-box mounted with silver, and by her fondness for drink. Everything about her was dark, but within she was luminous with an inextinguishable, joyful and ardent flame, which revealed itself in her eyes. Although she was bent, almost humpbacked, in fact, she moved lightly and softly, for all the world like a huge cat, and was just as gentle as that caressing animal.

Until she came into my life I seemed to have been asleep, and hidden away in obscurity; but when she appeared she woke me and led me to the light of day.

Connecting all my impressions by a single thread, she wove them into a pattern of many colors, thus making herself my friend for life, the being nearest my heart, the dearest and best known of all; while her disinterested love for all creation enriched me, and built up the strength needful for a hard life.

. . . . . .

Forty years ago boats traveled slowly; we were a long time getting to Nijni, and I shall never forget those days almost overladen with beauty.

Good weather had set in. From morning till night I was on the deck with grandmother, under a clear sky, gliding between the autumn-gilded shores of the Volga, without hurry, lazily; and, with many resounding groans, as she rose and fell on the gray-blue water, a barge attached by a long rope was being drawn along by the bright red steamer. The barge was gray, and reminded me of a wood-louse.

Unperceived, the sun floated over the Volga. Every hour we were in the midst of fresh scenes; the green hills rose up like rich folds on earth's sumptuous vesture; on the shore stood towns and villages; the golden autumn leaves floated on the water.

"Look how beautiful it all is!" grandmother exclaimed every minute, going from one side of the boat to the other, with a radiant face, and eyes wide with joy. Very often, gazing at the shore, she would for-

get me; she would stand on the deck, her hands folded on her breast, smiling and in silence, with her eyes full of tears. I would tug at her skirt of dark, sprigged linen.

"Ah!" she would exclaim, starting. "I must have fallen asleep, and begun to dream."

"But why are you crying?"

"For joy and for old age, my dear," she would reply, smiling. "I am getting old, you know—sixty years have passed over my head."

And taking a pinch of snuff, she would begin to tell me some wonderful stories about kind-hearted brigands, holy people, and all sorts of wild animals and evil spirits.

She would tell me these stories softly, mysteriously, with her face close to mine, fixing me with her dilated eyes, thus actually infusing into me the strength which was growing within me. The longer she spoke, or rather sang, the more melodiously flowed her words. It was inexpressibly pleasant to listen to her.

I would listen and beg for another, and this is what I got:

"In the stove there lives an old goblin; once he got a splinter into his paw, and rocked to and fro whimpering, 'Oh, little mice, it hurts very much; oh, little mice, I can't bear it!' "

Raising her foot, she took it in her hands and

wagged it from side to side, wrinkling up her face so funnily, just as if she herself had been hurt.

The sailors who stood round—bearded, good-natured men—listening and laughing, and praising the stories, would say:

"Now, Grandmother, give us another."

Afterwards they would say:

"Come and have supper with us."

At supper they regaled her with vodka, and me with water-melon; this they did secretly, for there went to and fro on the boat a man who forbade the eating of fruit, and used to take it away and throw it in the river. He was dressed like an official, and was always drunk; people kept out of his sight.

On rare occasions my mother came on deck, and stood on the side farthest from us. She was always silent. Her large, well-formed body, her grim face, her heavy crown of plaited, shining hair—all about her was compact and solid, and she appeared to me as if she were enveloped in a fog or a transparent cloud, out of which she looked unamiably with her gray eyes, which were as large as grandmother's.

Once she exclaimed sternly:

"People are laughing at you, Mama!"

"God bless them!" answered grandmother, quite unconcerned. "Let them laugh, and good luck to 'em."

I remember the childish joy grandmother showed at the sight of Nijni. Taking my hand, she dragged me to the side, crying:

"Look! Look how beautiful it is! That 's Nijni, that is! There 's something heavenly about it. Look at the church too. Does n't it seem to have wings?" And she turned to my mother, nearly weeping. "Varusha, look, won't you? Come here! You seem to have forgotten all about it. Can't you show a little gladness?"

My mother, with a frown, smiled bitterly.

When the boat arrived outside the beautiful town between two rivers blocked by vessels, and bristling with hundreds of slender masts, a large boat containing many people was drawn alongside it. Catching the boat-hook in the gangway, one after another the passengers came on board. A short, wizened man, dressed in black, with a red-gold beard, a bird-like nose, and green eyes, pushed his way in front of the others.

"Papa!" my mother cried in a hoarse, loud voice, as she threw herself into his arms; but he, taking her face in his little red hands and hastily patting her cheeks, cried:

"Now, silly! What 's the matter with you? . . ."

Grandmother embraced and kissed them all at once, turning round and round like a peg-top; she pushed me towards them, saying quickly:

"Now—make haste! This is Uncle Michael, this is Jaakov, this is Aunt Natalia, these are two brothers both called Sascha, and their sister Katerina. This is all our family. Is n't it a large one?"

Grandfather said to her:

"Are you quite well, Mother?" and they kissed each other three times.

He then drew me from the dense mass of people, and laying his hand on my head, asked:

"And who may you be?"

"I am the Astrakhan boy from the cabin."

"What on earth is he talking about?" Grandfather turned to my mother, but without waiting for an answer, shook me and said: "You are a chip of the old block. Get into the boat."

Having landed, the crowd of people wended its way up the hill by a road paved with rough cobblestones between two steep slopes covered with trampled grass.

Grandfather and mother went in front of us all. He was a head shorter than she was, and walked with little hurried steps; while she, looking down on him from her superior height, appeared literally to float beside him. After them walked dark, sleek-haired Uncle Michael, wizened like grandfather, bright and curly-headed Jaakov, some fat women in brightly colored dresses, and six children, all older than myself

and all very quiet. I was with grandmother and little Aunt Natalia. Pale, blue-eyed and stout, she frequently stood still, panting and whispering:

"Oh, I can't go any farther!"

"Why did they trouble you to come?" grumbled grandmother angrily. "They are a silly lot!"

I did not like either the grown-up people nor the children; I felt myself to be a stranger in their midst —even grandmother had somehow become estranged and distant.

Most of all I disliked my uncle; I felt at once that he was my enemy, and I was conscious of a certain feeling of cautious curiosity towards him.

We had now arrived at the end of our journey.

At the very top, perched on the right slope, stood the first building in the street—a squat, one-storied house, decorated with dirty pink paint, with a narrow overhanging roof and bow-windows. Looked at from the street it appeared to be a large house, but the interior, with its gloomy, tiny rooms, was cramped. Everywhere, as on the landing-stage, angry people strove together, and a vile smell pervaded the whole place.

I went out into the yard. That also was unpleasant. It was strewn with large, wet cloths and lumbered with tubs, all containing muddy water, of the same hue, in which other cloths lay soaking. In the corner of a half-tumbled-down shed the logs burned

brightly in a stove, upon which something was boiling or baking, and an unseen person uttered these strange words:

"Santaline, fuchsin, vitriol!"

CHAPTER II

THEN began and flowed on with astonishing rapidity an intense, varied, inexpressibly strange life. It reminded me of a crude story, well told by a good-natured but irritatingly truthful genius. Now, in recalling the past, I myself find it difficult to believe, at this distance of time, that things really were as they were, and I have longed to dispute or reject the facts—the cruelty of the drab existence of an unwelcome relation is too painful to contemplate. But truth is stronger than pity, and besides, I am writing not about myself but about that narrow, stifling environment of unpleasant impressions in which lived—aye, and to this day lives—the average Russian of this class.

My grandfather's house simply seethed with mutual hostility; all the grown people were infected and even the children were inoculated with it. I had learned, from overhearing grandmother's conversation, that my mother arrived upon the very day when her brothers demanded the distribution of the property from their father. Her unexpected return made their desire for this all the keener and stronger, because they were afraid that my mother would claim the dowry intended

for her, but withheld by my grandfather because she had married secretly and against his wish. My uncles considered that this dowry ought to be divided amongst them all. Added to this, they had been quarreling violently for a long time among themselves as to who should open a workshop in the town, or on the Oka in the village of Kunavin.

One day, very shortly after our arrival, a quarrel broke out suddenly at dinner-time. My uncles started to their feet and, leaning across the table, began to shout and yell at grandfather, snarling and shaking themselves like dogs; and grandfather, turning very red, rapped on the table with a spoon and cried in a piercing tone of voice, like the crowing of a cock: "I will turn you out of doors!"

With her face painfully distorted, grandmother said: "Give them what they ask, Father; then you will have some peace."

"Be quiet, simpleton!" shouted my grandfather with flashing eyes; and it was wonderful, seeing how small he was, that he could yell with such deafening effect.

My mother rose from the table, and going calmly to the window, turned her back upon us all.

Suddenly Uncle Michael struck his brother on the face with the back of his hand. The latter, with a howl of rage, grappled with him; both rolled on the floor growling, gasping for breath and abusing each

other. The children began to cry, and my Aunt Natalia, who was with child, screamed wildly; my mother seized her round the body and dragged her somewhere out of the way; the lively little nursemaid, Eugenia, drove the children out of the kitchen; chairs were knocked down; the young, broad-shouldered foreman, Tsiganok, sat on Uncle Michael's back, while the head of the works, Gregory Ivanovitch, a bald-headed, bearded man with colored spectacles, calmly bound up my uncle's hands with towels.

Turning his head and letting his thin, straggly, black beard trail on the floor, Uncle Michael cursed horribly, and grandfather, running round the table, exclaimed bitterly: "And these are brothers! . . . Blood relations! . . . Shame on you!"

At the beginning of the quarrel I had jumped on to the stove in terror; and thence, with painful amazement, I had watched grandmother as she washed Uncle Jaakov's battered face in a small basin of water, while he cried and stamped his feet, and she said in a sad voice: "Wicked creatures! You are nothing better than a family of wild beasts. When will you come to your senses?"

Grandfather, dragging his torn shirt over his shoulder, called out to her: "So you have brought wild animals into the world, eh, old woman?"

When Uncle Jaakov went out, grandmother retired

to a corner and, quivering with grief, prayed: "Holy Mother of God, bring my children to their senses."

Grandfather stood beside her, and, glancing at the table, on which everything was upset or spilled, said softly:

"When you think of them, Mother, and then of the little one they pester Varia about . . . who has the best nature?"

"Hold your tongue, for goodness' sake! Take off that shirt and I will mend it. . . ." And laying the palms of her hands on his head, grandmother kissed his forehead; and he—so small compared to her—pressing his face against her shoulder, said:

"We shall have to give them their shares, Mother, that is plain."

"Yes, Father, it will have to be done."

Then they talked for a long time; amicably at first, but it was not long before grandfather began to scrape his feet on the floor like a cock before a fight, and holding up a threatening finger to grandmother, said in a fierce whisper:

"I know you! You love them more than me. . . . And what is your Mischka?—a Jesuit! And Jaaschka —a Freemason! And they live on me. . . . Hangers-on! That is all they are."

Uneasily turning on the stove, I knocked down an iron, which fell with a crash like a thunder-clap.

Grandfather jumped up on the step, dragged me down, and stared at me as if he now saw me for the first time.

"Who put you on the stove? Your mother?"

"I got up there by myself."

"You are lying!"

"No I 'm not. I did get up there by myself. I was frightened."

He pushed me away from him, lightly striking me on the head with the palm of his hand.

"Just like your father! Get out of my sight!"

And I was only too glad to run out of the kitchen.

. . . . . .

I was very well aware that grandfather's shrewd, sharp green eyes followed me everywhere, and I was afraid of him. I remember how I always wished to hide myself from that fierce glance. It seemed to me that grandfather was malevolent; he spoke to every one mockingly and offensively, and, being provocative, did his best to put every one else out of temper.

"Ugh! *You!*" he exclaimed frequently.

The long-drawn-out sound "U-gh!" always reminds me of a sensation of misery and chill. In the recreation hour, the time for evening tea, when he, my uncles and the workmen came into the kitchen from the workshop weary, with their hands stained with santaline

and burnt by sulphuric acid, their hair bound with linen bands, all looking like the dark-featured icon in the corner of the kitchen—in that hour of dread my grandfather used to sit opposite to me, arousing the envy of the other grandchildren by speaking to me oftener than to them. Everything about him was trenchant and to the point. His heavy satin waistcoat embroidered with silk was old; his much-scrubbed shirt of colored cotton was crumpled; great patches flaunted themselves on the knees of his trousers; and yet he seemed to be dressed with more cleanliness and more refinement than his sons, who wore false shirtfronts and silk neckties.

Some days after our arrival he set me to learn the prayers. All the other children were older than myself, and were already being taught to read and write by the clerk of Uspenski Church. Timid Aunt Natalia used to teach me softly. She was a woman with a childlike countenance, and such transparent eyes that it seemed to me that, looking into them, one might see what was inside her head. I loved to look into those eyes of hers without shifting my gaze and without blinking; they used to twinkle as she turned her head away and said very softly, almost in a whisper: "That will do. . . . Now please say 'Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. . . .'" And if I asked, "What does 'hallowed be Thy name'

mean?" she would glance round timidly and admonish me thus: "Don't ask questions. It is wrong. Just say after me 'Our Father . . .'"

Her words troubled me. Why was it wrong to ask questions? The words "hallowed be Thy name" acquired a mysterious significance in my mind, and I purposely mixed them up in every possible way.

But my aunt, pale and almost exhausted, patiently cleared her throat, which was always husky, and said, "No, that is not right. Just say 'hallowed be Thy name.' It is plain enough."

But my aunt, pale and almost exhausted, patiently irritated me, and hindered me from remembering the prayer.

One day my grandfather inquired:

"Well, Oleysha, what have you been doing to-day? Playing? The bruises on your forehead told me as much. Bruises are got cheaply. And how about 'Our Father'? Have you learnt it?"

"He has a very bad memory," said my aunt softly.

Grandfather smiled as if he were glad, lifting his sandy eyebrows. "And what of it? He must be whipped; that 's all."

And again he turned to me.

"Did your father ever whip you?"

As I did not know what he was talking about, I was silent, but my mother replied:

"No, Maxim never beat him, and what is more, forbade me to do so."

"And why, may I ask?"

"He said that beating is not education."

"He was a fool about everything—that Maxim. May God forgive me for speaking so of the dead!" exclaimed grandfather distinctly and angrily. He saw at once that these words enraged me. "What is that sullen face for?" he asked. "Ugh! . . . *You!* . . ." And smoothing down his reddish, silver-streaked hair, he added: "And this very Saturday I am going to give Sascha a hiding."

"What is a hiding?" I asked.

They all laughed, and grandfather said: "Wait a bit, and you shall see."

In secret I pondered over the word "hiding." Apparently it had the same meaning as to whip and beat. I had seen people beat horses, dogs and cats, and in Astrakhan the soldiers used to beat the Persians; but I had never before seen any one beat little children. Yet here my uncles hit their own children over the head and shoulders, and they bore it without resentment, merely rubbing the injured part; and if I asked them whether they were hurt, they always answered bravely:

"No, not a bit."

Then there was the famous story of the thimble.

In the evenings, from tea-time to supper-time, my uncles and the head workman used to sew portions of dyed material into one piece, to which they affixed tickets. Wishing to play a trick on half-blind Gregory, Uncle Michael had told his nine-year-old nephew to make his thimble red-hot in the candle-flame. Sascha heated the thimble in the snuffers, made it absolutely red-hot, and contriving, without attracting attention, to place it close to Gregory's hand, hid himself by the stove; but as luck would have it, grandfather himself came in at that very moment and, sitting down to work, slipped his finger into the red-hot thimble.

Hearing the tumult, I ran into the kitchen, and I shall never forget how funny grandfather looked nursing his burnt finger as he jumped about and shrieked:

"Where is the villain who played this trick?"

Uncle Michael, doubled up under the table, snatched up the thimble and blew upon it; Gregory unconcernedly went on sewing, while the shadows played on his enormous bald patch. Then Uncle Jaakov rushed in, and, hiding himself in the corner by the stove, stood there quietly laughing; grandmother busied herself with grating up raw potatoes.

"Sascha Jaakov did it!" suddenly exclaimed Uncle Michael.

"Liar!" cried Jaakov, darting out from behind the stove.

But his son, from one of the corners, wept and wailed:

"Papa! don't believe him. He showed me how to do it himself."

My uncles began to abuse each other, but grandfather all at once grew calm, put a poultice of grated potatoes on his finger, and silently went out, taking me with him.

They all said that Uncle Michael was to blame. I asked naturally if he would be whipped, or get a hiding.

"He ought to," answered grandfather, with a sidelong glance at me.

Uncle Michael, striking his hand upon the table, bawled at my mother: "Varvara, make your pup hold his jaw before I knock his head off."

"Go on, then; try to lay your hands on him!" replied my mother. And no one said another word.

She had a gift of pushing people out of her way, brushing them aside as it were, and making them feel very small by a few brief words like these. It was perfectly clear to me that they were all afraid of her; even grandfather spoke to her more quietly than he spoke to the others. It gave me great satisfaction to observe this, and in my pride I used to say openly to my cousins: "My mother is a match for all of them." And they did not deny it.

But the events which happened on Saturday diminished my respect for my mother.

. . . . . .

By Saturday I also had had time to get into trouble. I was fascinated by the ease with which the grown-up people changed the color of different materials; they took something yellow, steeped it in black dye, and it came out dark blue. They laid a piece of gray stuff in reddish water and it was dyed mauve. It was quite simple, yet to me it was inexplicable. I longed to dye something myself, and I confided my desire to Sascha Yaakovitch, a thoughtful boy, always in favor with his elders, always good-natured, obliging, and ready to wait upon every one.

The adults praised him highly for his obedience and his cleverness, but grandfather looked on him with no favorable eye, and used to say:

"An artful beggar that!"

Thin and dark, with prominent, watchful eyes, Sascha Yaakov used to speak in a low, rapid voice, as if his words were choking him, and all the while he talked he glanced fearfully from side to side as if he were ready to run away and hide himself on the slightest pretext. The pupils of his hazel eyes were stationary except when he was excited, and then they became merged into the whites. I did not like him. I much preferred the despised idler, Sascha Michail-

ovitch. He was a quiet boy, with sad eyes and a pleasing smile, very like his kind mother. He had ugly, protruding teeth, with a double row in the upper jaw; and being very greatly concerned about this defect, he constantly had his fingers in his mouth, trying to loosen his back ones, very amiably allowing any one who chose to inspect them. But that was the only interesting thing about him. He lived a solitary life in a house swarming with people, loving to sit in the dim corners in the daytime, and at the window in the evening; quite happy if he could remain without speaking, with his face pressed against the pane for hours together, gazing at the flock of jackdaws which, now rising high above it, now sinking swiftly earthwards, in the red evening sky, circled round the dome of Uspenski Church, and finally, obscured by an opaque black cloud, disappeared somewhere, leaving a void behind them. When he had seen this he had no desire to speak of it, but a pleasant languor took possession of him.

Uncle Jaakov's Sascha, on the contrary, could talk about everything fluently and with authority, like a grown-up person. Hearing of my desire to learn the process of dyeing, he advised me to take one of the best white tablecloths from the cupboard and dye it blue.

"White always takes the color better, I know," he said very seriously.

I dragged out a heavy tablecloth and ran with it to

the yard, but I had no more than lowered the hem of it into the vat of dark-blue dye when Tsiganok flew at me from somewhere, rescued the cloth, and wringing it out with his rough hands, cried to my cousin, who had been looking on at my work from a safe place:

"Call your grandmother quickly."

And shaking his black, dishevelled head ominously, he said to me:

"You 'll catch it for this."

Grandmother came running on to the scene, wailing, and even weeping, at the sight, and scolded me in her ludicrous fashion:

"Oh, you young pickle! I hope you will be spanked for this."

Afterwards, however, she said to Tsiganok: "You need n't say anything about this to grandfather, Vanka. I 'll manage to keep it from him. Let us hope that something will happen to take up his attention."

Vanka replied in a preoccupied manner, drying his hands on his multi-colored apron:

"Me? I shan't tell: but you had better see that that Sascha does n't go and tell tales."

"I will give him something to keep him quiet," said grandmother, leading me into the house.

On Saturday, before vespers, I was called into the kitchen, where it was all dark and still. I remember the closely shut doors of the shed and of the room,

and the gray mist of an autumn evening, and the heavy patter of rain. Sitting in front of the stove on a narrow bench, looking cross and quite unlike himself, was Tsiganok; grandfather, standing in the chimney corner, was taking long rods out of a pail of water, measuring them, putting them together, and flourishing them in the air with a shrill whistling sound. Grandmother, somewhere in the shadows, was taking snuff noisily and muttering:

"Now you are in your element, tyrant!"

Sascha Jaakov was sitting in a chair in the middle of the kitchen, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles, and whining like an old beggar in a voice quite unlike his usual voice:

"Forgive me, for Christ's sake. . . .!"

Standing by the chair, shoulder to shoulder, like wooden figures, stood the children of Uncle Michael, brother and sister.

"When I have flogged you I will forgive you," said grandfather, drawing a long, damp rod across his knuckles.

"Now then . . . take down your breeches!"

He spoke very calmly, and neither the sound of his voice nor the noise made by the boy as he moved on the squeaky chair, nor the scraping of grandmother's feet, broke the memorable stillness of that almost dark kitchen, under the low, blackened ceiling.

Sascha stood up, undid his trousers, letting them down as far as his knees, then bending and holding them up with his hands, he stumbled to the bench. It was painful to look at him, and my legs also began to tremble.

But worse was to come, when he submissively lay down on the bench face downwards, and Vanka, tying him to it by means of a wide towel placed under his arms and round his neck, bent under him and with black hands seized his legs by the ankles.

"Lexei!" called grandfather. "Come nearer! Come! Don't you hear me speaking to you? Look and see what a flogging is. . . . One!"

With a mild flourish he brought the rod down on the naked flesh, and Sascha set up a howl.

"Rubbish!" said grandfather. "That 's nothing! . . . But here 's something to make you smart."

And he dealt such blows that the flesh was soon in a state of inflammation and covered with great red weals, and my cousin gave a prolonged howl.

"Is n't it nice?" asked grandfather, as his hand rose and fell. "You don't like it? . . . That 's for the thimble!"

When he raised his hand with a flourish my heart seemed to rise too, and when he let his hand fall something within me seemed to sink.

"I won't do it again," squealed Sascha, in a dread-

fully thin, weak voice, unpleasant to hear. "Did n't I tell—did n't I tell about the tablecloth?"

Grandfather answered calmly, as if he were reading the "Psalter":

"Tale-bearing is no justification. The informer gets whipped first, so take that for the tablecloth."

Grandmother threw herself upon me and seized my hand, crying: "I won't allow Lexei to be touched! I won't allow it, you monster!" And she began to kick the door, calling: "Varia! Varvara!"

Grandfather darted across to her, threw her down, seized me and carried me to the bench. I struck at him with my fists, pulled his sandy beard, and bit his fingers. He bellowed and held me as in a vice. In the end, throwing me down on the bench, he struck me on the face.

I shall never forget his savage cry: "Tie him up! I 'm going to kill him!" nor my mother's white face and great eyes as she ran along up and down beside the bench, shrieking:

"Father! You must n't! Let me have him!"

. . . . . .

Grandfather flogged me till I lost consciousness, and I was unwell for some days, tossing about, face downwards, on a wide, stuffy bed, in a little room with one window and a lamp which was always kept burning

before the case of icons in the corner. Those dark days had been the greatest in my life. In the course of them I had developed wonderfully, and I was conscious of a peculiar difference in myself. I began to experience a new solicitude for others, and I became so keenly alive to their sufferings and my own that it was almost as if my heart had been lacerated, and thus rendered sensitive.

For this reason the quarrel between my mother and grandmother came as a great shock to me—when grandmother, looking so dark and big in the narrow room, flew into a rage, and pushing my mother into the corner where the icons were, hissed:

"Why did n't you take him away?"

"I was afraid."

"A strong, healthy creature like you! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Varvara! I am an old woman and I am not afraid. For shame!"

"Do leave off, Mother; I am sick of the whole business."

"No, you don't love him! You have no pity for the poor orphan!"

"I have been an orphan all my life," said my mother, speaking loudly and sadly.

After that they both cried for a long time, seated on a box in a corner, and then my mother said:

"If it were not for Alexei, I would leave this place —and go right away. I can't go on living in this hell, Mother, I can't! I have n't the strength."

"Oh! My own flesh and blood!" whispered grandmother.

I kept all this in my mind. Mother was weak, and, like the others, she was afraid of grandfather, and I was preventing her from leaving the house in which she found it impossible to live. It was very unfortunate. Before long my mother really did disappear from the house, going somewhere on a visit.

Very soon after this, as suddenly as if he had fallen from the ceiling, grandfather appeared, and sitting on the bed, laid his ice-cold hands on my head.

"How do you do, young gentleman? Come! answer me. Don't sulk! Well? What have you to say?"

I had a great mind to kick away his legs, but it hurt me to move. His head, sandier than ever, shook from side to side uneasily; his bright eyes seemed to be looking for something on the wall as he pulled out of his pocket a gingerbread goat, a horn made of sugar, an apple and a cluster of purple raisins, which he placed on the pillow under my very nose.

"There you are! There 's a present for you."

And he stooped and kissed me on the forehead.

Then, stroking my head with those small, cruel hands, yellow-stained about the crooked, claw-like nails, he began to speak.

"I left my mark on you then, my friend. You were very angry. You bit me and scratched me, and then I lost my temper too. However, it will do you no harm to have been punished more severely than you deserved. It will go towards next time. You must learn not to mind when people of your own family beat you. It is part of your training. It would be different if it came from an outsider, but from one of us it does not count. You must not allow outsiders to lay hands on you, but it is nothing coming from one of your own family. I suppose you think I was never flogged? Oleysha! I was flogged harder than you could ever imagine even in a bad dream. I was flogged so cruelly that God Himself might have shed tears to see it. And what was the result? I—an orphan, the son of a poor mother—have risen in my present position—the head of a guild, and a master workman."

Bending his withered, well-knit body towards me, he began to tell me in vigorous and powerful language, with a felicitous choice of words, about the days of his childhood. His green eyes were very bright, and his golden hair stood rakishly on end as, deflecting his high-pitched voice, he breathed in my face.

"You traveled here by steamboat . . . steam will

take you anywhere now; but when I was young I had to tow a barge up the Volga all by myself. The barge was in the water and I ran barefoot on the bank, which was strewn with sharp stones. . . . Thus I went from early in the morning to sunset, with the sun beating fiercely on the back of my neck, and my head throbbing as if it were full of molten iron. And sometimes I was overcome by three kinds of ill-luck . . . my poor little bones ached, but I had to keep on, and I could not see the way; and then my eyes brimmed over, and I sobbed my heart out as the tears rolled down. Ah! Oleysha! it won't bear talking about.

"I went on and on till the towing-rope slipped from me and I fell down on my face, and I was not sorry for it either! I rose up all the stronger. If I had not rested a minute I should have died.

"That is the way we used to live then in the sight of God and of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ. This is the way I took the measure of Mother Volga three times, from Simbirsk to Ribinsk, from there to Saratov, as far as Astrakhan and Markarev, to the Fair—more than three thousand versts. And by the fourth year I had become a free water-man. I had shown my master what I was made of."

As he spoke he seemed to increase in size like a cloud before my very eyes, being transformed from a small, wizened old man to an individual of fabulous

strength. Had he not pulled a great gray barge up the river all by himself? Now and again he jumped up from the bed and showed me how the barges traveled with the towing-rope round them, and how they pumped water, singing fragments of a song in a bass voice; then, youthfully springing back on the bed, to my ever-increasing astonishment, he would continue hoarsely and impressively.

"Well, sometimes, Oleysha, on a summer's evening when we arrived at Jigulak, or some such place at the foot of the green hills, we used to sit about lazily cooking our supper while the boatmen of the hill-country used to sing sentimental songs, and as soon as they began the whole crew would strike up, sending a thrill through one, and making the Volga seem as if it were running very fast like a horse, and rising up as high as the clouds; and all kinds of trouble seemed as nothing more than dust blown about by the wind. They sang till the porridge boiled over, for which the cook had to be flicked with a cloth. 'Play as much as you please, but don't forget your work,' we said."

Several times people put their heads in at the door to call him, but each time I begged him not to go.

And he laughingly waved them away, saying, "Wait a bit."

He stayed with me and told me stories until it was almost dark, and when, after an affectionate farewell,

he left me, I had learned that he was neither malevolent nor formidable. It brought the tears into my eyes to remember that it was he who had so cruelly beaten me, but I could not forget it.

This visit of my grandfather opened the door to others, and from morning till night there was always somebody sitting on my bed, trying to amuse me; I remember that this was not always either cheering or pleasant.

Oftener than any of them came my grandmother, who slept in the same bed with me. But it was Tsiganok who left the clearest impression on me in those days. He used to appear in the evenings—square-built, broad-chested, curly headed, dressed in his best clothes—a gold-embroidered shirt, plush breeches, boots squeaking like a harmonium. His hair was glossy, his squinting, merry eyes gleamed under his thick eyebrows, and his white teeth under the shadow of his young mustache; his shirt glowed softly as if reflecting the red light of the image-lamp.

"Look here!" he said, turning up his sleeve and displaying his bare arm to the elbow. It was covered with red scars. "Look how swollen it is; and it was worse yesterday—it was very painful. When your grandfather flew into a rage and I saw that he was going to flog you, I put my arm in the way, thinking that the rod would break, and then while he was look-

ing for another your grandmother or your mother could take you away and hide you. I am an old bird at the game, my child."

He laughed gently and kindly, and glancing again at the swollen arm, went on:

"I was so sorry for you that I thought I should choke. It seemed such a shame! . . . But he lashed away at you!"

Snorting and tossing his head like a horse, he went on speaking about the affair. This childish simplicity seemed to draw him closer to me. I told him that I loved him very much, and he answered with a simplicity which always lives in my memory.

"And I love you too! That is why I let myself be hurt—because I love you. Do you think I would have done it for any one else? I should be making a fool of myself."

Later on he gave me whispered instructions, glancing frequently at the door. "Next time he beats you don't try to get away from him, and don't struggle. It hurts twice as much if you resist. If you let yourself go he will deal lightly with you. Be limp and soft, and don't scowl at him. Try and remember this; it is good advice."

"Surely he won't whip me again!" I exclaimed.

"Why, of course!" replied Tsiganok calmly. "Of course he will whip you again, and often too!"

"But why?"

"Because grandfather is on the watch for you." And again he cautiously advised me: "When he whips you he brings the rod straight down. Well, if you lie there quietly he may possibly hold the rod lower so that it won't break your skin. . . . Now, do you understand? Move your body towards him and the rod, and it will be all the better for you."

Winking at me with his dark, squinting eyes, he added: "I know more about such matters than a policeman even. I have been beaten on my bare shoulders till the skin came off, my boy!"

I looked at his bright face and remembered grandmother's story of Ivan-Czarevitch and Ivanoshka-dourachka.

CHAPTER III

WHEN I was well again I realized that Tsiganok occupied an important position in the household. Grandfather did not storm at him as he did at his sons, and would say behind his back, half-closing his eyes and nodding his head:

"He is a good workman—Tsiganok. Mark my words, he will get on; he will make his fortune."

My uncles too were polite and friendly with Tsiganok, and never played practical jokes on him as they did on the head workman, Gregory, who was the object of some insulting and spiteful trick almost every evening. Sometimes they made the handles of his scissors red-hot, or put a nail with the point upwards on the seat of his chair, or placed ready to his hand pieces of material all of the same color, so that when he, being half blind, had sewed them all into one piece, grandfather should scold him for it.

One day when he had fallen asleep after dinner in the kitchen, they painted his face with fuchsin, and he had to go about for a long time a ludicrous and terrifying spectacle, with two round, smeared eyeglasses look-

ing out dully from his gray beard, and his long, livid nose drooping dejectedly, like a tongue.

They had an inexhaustible fund of such pranks, but the head workman bore it all in silence, only quackling softly, and taking care before he touched either the iron, the scissors, the needlework or the thimble, to moisten his fingers copiously with saliva. This became a habit with him, and even at dinner-time before he took up his knife and fork he slobbered over his fingers, causing great amusement to the children. When he was hurt, his large face broke into waves of wrinkles, which curiously glided over his forehead, and, raising his eyebrows, vanished mysteriously on his bald cranium.

I do not remember how grandfather bore himself with regard to his sons' amusements, but grandmother used to shake her fist at them, crying:

"Shameless, ill-natured creatures!"

But my uncles spoke evil of Tsiganok too behind his back; they made fun of him, found fault with his work, and called him a thief and an idler.

I asked grandmother why they did this. She explained it to me without hesitation, and, as always, made the matter quite clear to me. "You see, each wants to take Vaniushka with him when he sets up in business for himself; that is why they run him down to each other. Say they, 'He 's a bad workman'; but

they don't mean it. It is their artfulness. In addition to this, they are afraid that Vaniushka will not go with either of them, but will stay with grandfather, who always gets his own way, and might set up a third workshop with Ivanka, which would do your uncles no good. Now do you understand?" She laughed softly. "They are crafty about everything, setting God at naught; and grandfather, seeing their artfulness, teases them by saying: 'I shall buy Ivan a certificate of exemption so that they won't take him for a soldier. I can't do without him.' This makes them angry; it is just what they don't want; besides, they grudge the money. Exemptions cost money."

I was living with grandmother again, as I had done on the steamer, and every evening before I fell asleep she used to tell me fairy stories, or tales about her life, which were just like a story. But she spoke about family affairs, such as the distribution of the property amongst the children, and grandfather's purchase of a new house, lightly, in the character of a stranger regarding the matter from a distance, or at the most that of a neighbor, rather than that of the person next in importance to the head of the house.

From her I learned that Tsiganok was a foundling; he had been found one wet night in early spring, on a bench in the porch.

"There he lay," said grandmother pensively and

mysteriously, "hardly able to cry, for he was nearly numb with cold."

"But why do people abandon children?"

"It is because the mother has no milk, or anything to feed her baby with. Then she hears that a child which has been born somewhere lately is dead, and she goes and leaves her own there."

She paused and scratched her head; then sighing and gazing at the ceiling, she continued:

"Poverty is always the reason, Oleysha; and a kind of poverty which must not be talked about, for an unmarried girl dare not admit that she has a child—people would cry shame upon her.

"Grandfather wanted to hand Vaniushka over to the police, but I said 'No, we will keep him ourselves to fill the place of our dead ones.' For I have had eighteen children, you know. If they had all lived they would have filled a street—eighteen new families! I was married at eighteen, you see, and by this time I had had fifteen children, but God so loved my flesh and blood that He took all of them—all my little babies to the angels, and I was sorry and glad at the same time."

Sitting on the edge of the bed in her nightdress, huge and dishevelled, with her black hair falling about her, she looked like the bear which a bearded woodman from Cergatch had led into our yard not long ago.

Making the sign of the cross on her spotless, snow-

white breast, she laughed softly, always ready to make light of everything.

"It was better for them to be taken, but hard for me to be left desolate, so I was delighted to have Ivanka —but even now I feel the pain of my love for you, my little ones! . . . Well, we kept him, and baptized him, and he still lives happily with us. At first I used to call him 'Beetle,' because he really did buzz sometimes, and went creeping and buzzing through the rooms just like a beetle. You must love him. He is a good soul."

I did love Ivan, and admired him inexpressibly. On Saturday when, after punishing the children for the transgressions of the week, grandfather went to vespers, we had an indescribably happy time in the kitchen.

Tsiganok would get some cockroaches from the stove, make a harness of thread for them with great rapidity, cut out a paper sledge, and soon two pairs of black horses were prancing on the clean, smooth, yellow table. Ivan drove them at a canter, with a thin splinter of wood as a whip, and urged them on, shouting:

"Now they have started for the Bishop's house."

Then he gummed a small piece of paper to the back of one of the cockroaches and sent him to run behind the sledge.

"We forgot the bag," he explained. "The monk drags it with him as he runs. Now then, gee-up!"

He tied the feet of another cockroach together with cotton, and as the insect hopped along, with its head thrust forward, he cried, clapping his hands:

"This is the deacon coming out of the wineshop to say vespers."

After this he showed us a mouse which stood up at the word of command, and walked on his hind legs, dragging his long tail behind him and blinking comically with his lively eyes, which were like black glass beads.

He made friends of mice, and used to carry them about in his bosom, and feed them with sugar and kiss them.

"Mice are clever creatures," he used to say in a tone of conviction. "The house-goblin is very fond of them, and whoever feeds them will have all his wishes granted by the old hob-goblin."

He could do conjuring tricks with cards and coins too, and he used to shout louder than any of the children; in fact, there was hardly any difference between them and him. One day when they were playing cards with him they made him "booby" several times in succession, and he was very much offended. He stuck his lips out sulkily and refused to play any more, and

he complained to me afterward, his nose twitching as he spoke:

"It was a put-up job! They were signaling to one another and passing the cards about under the table. Do you call that playing the game? If it comes to trickery I 'm not so bad at it myself."

Yet he was nineteen years old and bigger than all four of us put together.

I have special memories of him on holiday evenings, when grandfather and Uncle Michael went out to see their friends, and curly headed, untidy Uncle Jaakov appeared with his guitar while grandmother prepared tea with plenty of delicacies, and vodka in a square bottle with red flowers cleverly molded in glass on its lower part. Tsiganok shone bravely on these occasions in his holiday attire. Creeping softly and sideways came Gregory, with his colored spectacles gleaming; came Nyanya Eugenia—pimply, red-faced and fat like a Toby-jug, with cunning eyes and a piping voice; came the hirsute deacon from Uspenski, and other dark slimy people bearing a resemblance to pikes and eels. They all ate and drank a lot, breathing hard the while; and the children had wineglasses of sweet syrup given them as a treat, and gradually there was kindled a warm but strange gaiety.

Uncle Jaakov tuned his guitar amorously, and as he did so he always uttered the same words:

"Well, now let us begin!"

Shaking his curly head, he bent over the guitar, stretching out his neck like a goose; the expression on his round, careless face became dreamy, his passionate, elusive eyes were obscured in an unctuous mist, and lightly touching the chords, he played something disjointed, involuntarily rising to his feet as he played. His music demanded an intense silence. It rushed like a rapid torrent from somewhere far away, stirring one's heart and penetrating it with an incomprehensible sensation of sadness and uneasiness. Under the influence of that music we all became melancholy, and the oldest present felt themselves to be no more than children. We sat perfectly still—lost in a dreamy silence. Sascha Michailov especially listened with all his might as he sat upright beside our uncle, gazing at the guitar open-mouthed, and slobbering with delight. And the rest of us remained as if we had been frozen, or had been put under a spell. The only sound besides was the gentle murmur of the samovar which did not interfere with the complaint of the guitar.

Two small square windows threw their light into the darkness of the autumn night, and from time to time some one tapped on them lightly. The yellow lights of two tallow candles, pointed like spears, flickered on the table.

Uncle Jaakov grew more and more rigid, as though

he were in a deep sleep with his teeth clenched; but his hands seemed to live with a separate existence. The bent fingers of his right hand quivered indistinctly over the dark keyboard, just like fluttering and struggling birds, while his left passed up and down the neck with elusive rapidity.

When he had been drinking he nearly always sang through his teeth in an unpleasantly shrill voice, an endless song:

"If Jaakove were a dog
He 'd howl from morn to night.
Oie! I am a-weary!
Oie! Life is dreary!
In the streets the nuns walk,
On the fence the ravens talk.
Oie! I am a-weary!
The cricket chirps behind the stove
And sets the beetles on the move.
Oie! I am a-weary!
One beggar hangs his stockings up to dry,
The other steals it away on the sly.
Oie! I am a-weary!
Yes! Life is very dreary!"

I could not bear this song, and when my uncle came to the part about the beggars I used to weep in a tempest of ungovernable misery.

The music had the same effect on Tsiganok as on the others; he listened to it, running his fingers through

his black, shaggy locks, and staring into a corner, half-asleep.

Sometimes he would exclaim unexpectedly in a complaining tone, "Ah! if I only had a voice. Lord! how I should sing."

And grandmother, with a sigh, would say: "Are you going to break our hearts, Jaasha? . . . Suppose you give us a dance, Vanyatka?"

Her request was not always complied with at once, but it did sometimes happen that the musician suddenly swept the chords with his hands, then, doubling up his fists with a gesture as if he were noiselessly casting an invisible something from him to the floor, cried sharply:

"Away, melancholy! Now, Vanka, stand up!"

Looking very smart, as he pulled his yellow blouse straight, Tsiganok would advance to the middle of the kitchen, very carefully, as if he were walking on nails, and blushing all over his swarthy face and simpering bashfully, would say entreatingly:

"Faster, please, Jaakov Vassilitch!"

The guitar jingled furiously, heels tapped spasmodically on the floor, plates and dishes rattled on the table and in the cupboard, while Tsiganok blazed amidst the kitchen lights, swooping like a kite, waving his arms like the sails of a windmill, and moving his

feet so quickly that they seemed to be stationary; then he stooped to the floor, and spun round and round like a golden swallow, the splendor of his silk blouse shedding an illumination all around, as it quivered and rippled, as if he were alight and floating in the air. He danced unweariedly, oblivious of everything, and it seemed as though, if the door were to open, he would have danced out, down the street, and through the town and away . . . beyond our ken.

"Cross over!" cried Uncle Jaakov, stamping his feet, and giving a piercing whistle; then in an irritating voice he shouted the old, quaint saying:

"Oh, my! if I were not sorry to leave my spade
I'd from my wife and children a break have made."

The people sitting at table pawed at each other, and from time to time shouted and yelled as if they were being roasted alive. The bearded chief workman slapped his bald head and joined in the uproar. Once he bent towards me, brushing my shoulder with his soft beard, and said in my ear, just as he might speak to a grown-up person:

"If your father were here, Alexei Maximitch, he would have added to the fun. A merry fellow he was—always cheerful. You remember him, don't you?"

"No."

"HE DANCED UNWEARIEDLY, OBLIVIOUS OF EVERYTHING"

"You don't? Well, once he and your grandmother —but wait a bit."

Tall and emaciated, somewhat resembling a conventional icon, he stood up, and bowing to grandmother, entreated in an extraordinarily gruff voice:

"Akulina Ivanovna, will you be so kind as to dance for us as you did once with Maxim Savatyevitch? It would cheer us up."

"What are you talking about, my dear man? What do you mean, Gregory Ivanovitch?" cried grandmother, smiling and bridling. "Fancy me dancing at my time of life! I should only make people laugh."

But suddenly she jumped up with a youthful air, arranged her skirts, and very upright, tossed her ponderous head and darted across the kitchen, crying:

"Well, laugh if you want to! And a lot of good may it do you. Now, Jaasha, play up!"

My uncle let himself go, and, closing his eyes, went on playing very slowly. Tsiganok stood still for a moment, and then leaped over to where grandmother was and encircled her, resting on his haunches, while she skimmed the floor without a sound, as if she were floating on air, her arms spread out, her eyebrows raised, her dark eyes gazing into space. She appeared very comical to me, and I made fun of her; but Gregory held up his finger sternly, and all the grown-up peo-

ple looked disapprovingly over to my side of the room.

"Don't make a noise, Ivan," said Gregory, and Tsiganok obediently jumped to one side, and sat by the door, while Nyanya Eugenia, thrusting out her Adam's apple, began to sing in her low-pitched, pleasant voice:

"All the week till Saturday
She does earn what e'er she may,
Making lace from morn till night
Till she 's nearly lost her sight."

Grandmother seemed more as if she were telling a story than dancing. She moved softly, dreamily; swaying slightly, sometimes looking about her from under her arms, the whole of her huge body wavering uncertainly, her feet feeling their way carefully. Then she stood still as if suddenly frightened by something; her face quivered and became overcast . . . but directly after it was again illuminated by her pleasant, cordial smile. Swinging to one side as if to make way for some one, she appeared to be refusing to give her hand, then letting her head droop seemed to die; again, she was listening to some one and smiling joyfully . . . and suddenly she was whisked from her place and turned round and round like a whirligig, her figure seemed to become more elegant, she seemed to grow taller, and we could not tear our eyes away from her—so triumphantly beautiful and altogether charming did

she appear in that moment of marvelous rejuvenation. And Nyanya Eugenia piped:

"Then on Sundays after Mass
Till midnight dances the lass,
Leaving as late as she dare,
Holidays with her are rare."

When she had finished dancing, grandmother returned to her place by the samovar. They all applauded her, and as she put her hair straight, she said:

"That is enough! You have never seen real dancing. At our home in Balakya, there was one young girl—I have forgotten her name now, with many others—but when you saw her dance you cried for joy. To look at her was a treat. You did n't want anything else. How I envied her—sinner that I was!"

"Singers and dancers are the greatest people in the world," said Nyanya Eugenia gravely, and she began to sing something about King David, while Uncle Jaakov, embracing Tsiganok, said to him:

"You ought to dance in the wineshops. You would turn people's heads."

"I wish I could sing!" complained Tsiganok. "If God had given me a voice I should have been singing ten years by now, and should have gone on singing if only as a monk."

They all drank vodka, and Gregory drank an extra

lot. As she poured out glass after glass for him, grandmother warned him:

"Take care, Grisha, or you 'll become quite blind."

"I don't care! I 've no more use for my eyesight," he replied firmly.

He drank, but he did not get tipsy, only becoming more loquacious every moment; and he spoke to me about my father nearly all the time.

"A man with a large heart was my friend Maxim Savatyevitch . . ."

Grandmother sighed as she corroborated:

"Yes, indeed he was—a true child of God."

All this was extremely interesting, and held me spell-bound, and filled my heart with a tender, not unpleasant sadness. For sadness and gladness live within us side by side, almost inseparable; the one succeeding the other with an elusive, unappreciable swiftness.

Once Uncle Jaakov, being rather tipsy, began to rend his shirt, and to clutch furiously at his curly hair, his grizzled mustache, his nose and his pendulous lip.

"What am I?" he howled, dissolved in tears. "Why am I here?" And striking himself on the cheek, forehead and chest, he sobbed: "Worthless, degraded creature! Lost soul!"

"A—ah! You 're right!" growled Gregory.

But grandmother, who was also not quite sober, said to her son, catching hold of his hand:

"That will do, Jaasha. God knows how to teach us."

When she had been drinking, she was even more attractive; her eyes grew darker and smiled, shedding the warmth of her heart upon every one. Brushing aside the handkerchief which made her face too hot, she would say in a tipsy voice:

"Lord! Lord! How good everything is! Don't you see how good everything is?"

And this was a cry from her heart—the watchword of her whole life.

I was much impressed by the tears and cries of my happy-go-lucky uncle, and I asked grandmother why he cried and scolded and beat himself so.

"You want to know everything!" she said reluctantly, quite unlike her usual manner. "But wait a bit. You will be enlightened about this affair quite soon enough."

My curiosity was still more excited by this, and I went to the workshop and attacked Ivan on the subject, but he would not answer me. He just laughed quietly with a sidelong glance at Gregory, and hustled me out, crying:

"Give over now, and run away. If you don't I 'll put you in the vat and dye you."

Gregory, standing before the broad, low stove, with vats cemented to it, stirred them with a long black

poker, lifting it up now and again to see the colored drops fall from its end. The brightly burning flames played on the skin-apron, multi-colored like the chasuble of a priest, which he wore. The dye simmered in the vats; an acrid vapor extended in a thick cloud to the door. Gregory glanced at me from under his glasses, with his clouded, bloodshot eyes, and said abruptly to Ivan:

"You are wanted in the yard. Can't you see?"

But when Tsiganok had gone into the yard, Gregory, sitting on a sack of santaline, beckoned me to him.

"Come here!"

Drawing me on to his knee, and rubbing his warm, soft beard against my cheek, he said in a tone of reminiscence:

"Your uncle beat and tortured his wife to death, and now his conscience pricks him. Do you understand? You want to understand everything, you see, and so you get muddled."

Gregory was as simple as grandmother, but his words were disconcerting, and he seemed to look through and through every one.

"How did he kill her?" he went on in a leisurely tone. "Why, like this. He was lying in bed with her, and he threw the counterpane over her head, and held it down while he beat her. Why? He doesn't know himself why he did it."

And paying no attention to Ivan, who, having returned with an armful of goods from the yard, was squatting before the fire, warming his hands, the head workman suggested:

"Perhaps it was because she was better than he was, and he was envious of her. The Kashmirins do not like good people, my boy. They are jealous of them. They cannot stand them, and try to get them out of the way. Ask your grandmother how they got rid of your father. She will tell you everything; she hates deceit, because she does not understand it. She may be reckoned among the saints, although she drinks wine and takes snuff. She is a splendid woman. Keep hold of her, and never let her go."

He pushed me towards the door, and I went out into the yard, depressed and scared. Vaniushka overtook me at the entrance of the house, and whispered softly:

"Don't be afraid of him. He is all right. Look him straight in the eyes. That 's what he likes."

It was all very strange and distressing. I hardly knew any other existence, but I remembered vaguely that my father and mother used not to live like this; they had a different way of speaking, and a different idea of happiness. They always went about together and sat close to each other. They laughed very frequently and for a long time together, in the evenings,

as they sat at the window and sang at the top of their voices; and people gathered together in the street and looked at them. The raised faces of these people as they looked up reminded me comically of dirty plates after dinner. But here people seldom laughed, and when they did it was not always easy to guess what they were laughing at. They often raged at one another, and secretly muttered threats against each other in the corners. The children were subdued and neglected; beaten down to earth like the dust by the rain. I felt myself a stranger in the house, and all the circumstances of my existence in it were nothing but a series of stabs, pricking me on to suspicion, and compelling me to study what went on with the closest attention.

My friendship with Tsiganok grew apace. Grandmother was occupied with household duties from sunrise till late at night, and I hung round Tsiganok nearly the whole day. He still used to put his hand under the rod whenever grandfather thrashed me, and the next day, displaying his swollen fingers, he would complain:

"There 's no sense in it! It does not make it any lighter for you, and look what it does to me. I won't stand it any longer, so there!"

But the next time he put himself in the way of being needlessly hurt just the same.

"But I thought you did not mean to do it again?" I would say.

"I did n't mean to, but it happened somehow. I did it without thinking."

Soon after this I learned something about Tsiganok which increased my interest in and love for him.

Every Friday he used to harness the bay gelding Sharapa, grandmother's pet—a cunning, saucy, dainty creature—to the sledge. Then he put on his fur coat, which reached to his knees, and his heavy cap, and tightly buckling his green belt, set out for the market to buy provisions. Sometimes it was very late before he returned, and the whole household became uneasy. Some one would run to the window every moment, and breathing on the panes to thaw the ice, would look up and down the road.

"Is n't he in sight yet?"

"No."

Grandmother was always more concerned than any of them.

"Alas!" she would exclaim to her sons and my grandfather, "you have ruined both the man and the horse. I wonder you are n't ashamed of yourselves, you conscienceless creatures! Ach! You family of fools, you tipplers! God will punish you for this."

"That is enough!" growled grandfather, scowling. "This is the last time it happens."

Sometimes Tsiganok did not return till midday. My uncles and grandfather hurried out to the yard to meet him, and grandmother ambled after them like a bear, taking snuff with a determined air, because it was her hour for taking it. The children ran out, and the joyful unloading of the sledge began. It was full of pork, dead birds, and joints of all kinds of meat.

"Have you bought all we told you to?" asked grandfather, probing the load with a sidelong glance of his sharp eyes.

"Yes, it is all right," answered Ivan gaily, as he jumped about the yard, and slapped his mittened hands together, to warm himself.

"Don't wear your mittens out. They cost money," said grandfather sternly. "Have you any change?"

"No."

Grandfather walked quietly round the load and said in a low tone:

"Again you have bought too much. However, you can't do it without money, can you? I'll have no more of this." And he strode away scowling.

My uncles joyfully set to work on the load, whistling as they balanced bird, fish, goose-giblets, calves' feet, and enormous pieces of meat on their hands.

"Well, that was soon unloaded!" they cried with loud approval.

Uncle Michael especially was in raptures, jumping

about the load, sniffing hard at the poultry, smacking his lips with relish, closing his restless eyes in ecstasy. He resembled his father; he had the same dried-up appearance, only he was taller and his hair was dark.

Slipping his chilled hands up his sleeves, he inquired of Tsiganok:

"How much did my father give you?"

"Five roubles."

"There is fifteen roubles' worth here! How much did you spend?"

"Four roubles, ten kopecks."

"Perhaps the other ninety kopecks is in your pocket. Have n't you noticed, Jaakov, how money gets all over the place?"

Uncle Jaakov, standing in the frost in his shirt-sleeves, laughed quietly, blinking in the cold blue light.

"You have some brandy for us, Vanka, have n't you?" he asked lazily.

Grandmother meanwhile was unharnessing the horse.

"There, my little one! There! Spoiled child! There, God's plaything!"

Great Sharapa, tossing his thick mane, fastened his white teeth in her shoulder, pushed his silky nose into her hair, gazed into her face with contented eyes, and shaking the frost from his eyelashes, softly neighed.

"Ah! you want some bread."

She thrust a large, salted crust in his mouth, and making her apron into a bag under his nose, she thoughtfully watched him eat.

Tsiganok, himself as playful as a young horse, sprang to her side.

"He is such a good horse, Grandma! And so clever!"

"Get away! Don't try your tricks on me!" cried grandmother, stamping her foot. "You know that I am not fond of you to-day."

She afterwards explained to me that Tsiganok had not bought so much in the market as he had stolen. "If grandfather gives him five roubles, he spends three and steals three roubles' worth," she said sadly. "He takes a pleasure in stealing. He is like a spoiled child. He tried it once, and it turned out well; he was laughed at and praised for his success, and that is how he got into the habit of thieving. And grandfather, who in his youth ate the bread of poverty till he wanted no more of it, has grown greedy in his old age, and money is dearer to him now than the blood of his own children! He is glad even of a present! As for Michael and Jaakov . . ."

She made a gesture of contempt and was silent a moment; then looking fixedly at the closed lid of her snuff-box, she went on querulously:

"But there, Lenya, that 's a bit of work done by a

blind woman . . . Dame Fortune . . . there she sits spinning for us and we can't even choose the pattern. . . . But there it is! If they caught Ivan thieving they would beat him to death."

And after another silence she continued quietly:

"Ah! we have plenty of principles, but we don't put them into practice."

The next day I begged Vanka not to steal any more. "If you do they'll beat you to death."

"They won't touch me . . . I should soon wriggle out of their clutches. I am as lively as a mettlesome horse," he said, laughing; but the next minute his face fell. "Of course I know quite well that it is wrong and risky to steal. I do it . . . just to amuse myself, because I am bored. And I don't save any of the money. Your uncles get it all out of me before the week is over. But I don't care! Let them take it. I have more than enough."

Suddenly he took me up in his arms, shaking me gently.

"You will be a strong man, you are so light and slim, and your bones are so firm. I say, why don't you learn to play on the guitar? Ask Uncle Jaakov! But you are too small yet, that's a pity! You're little, but you have a temper of your own! You don't like your grandfather much, do you?"

"I don't know."

"I don't like any of the Kashmirins except your grandmother. Let the devil like them!"

"What about me?"

"You? You are not a Kashmirin. You are a Pyeshkov. . . . That's different blood—a different stock altogether."

Suddenly he gave me a violent squeeze.

"Ah!" he almost groaned. "If only I had a good voice for singing! Good Lord! what a stir I should make in the world! . . . Run away now, old chap. I must get on with my work."

He set me down on the floor, put a handful of fine nails into his mouth, and began to stretch and nail damp breadths of black material on a large square board.

His end came very soon after this.

It happened thus. Leaning up against a partition by the gate in the yard was placed a large oaken cross with stout, knotty arms. It had been there a long time. I had noticed it in the early days of my life in the house, when it had been new and yellow, but now it was blackened by the autumn rains. It gave forth the bitter odor of barked oak, and it was in the way in the crowded, dirty yard.

Uncle Jaakov had bought it to place over the grave of his wife, and had made a vow to carry it on his shoulders to the cemetery on the anniversary of her

death, which fell on a Saturday at the beginning of winter.

It was frosty and windy and there had been a fall of snow. Grandfather and grandmother, with the three grandchildren, had gone early to the cemetery to hear the requiem; I was left at home as a punishment for some fault.

My uncles, dressed alike in short black fur coats, lifted the cross from the ground and stood under its arms. Gregory and some men not belonging to the yard raised the heavy beams with difficulty, and placed the cross on the broad shoulders of Tsiganok. He tottered, and his legs seemed to give way.

"Are you strong enough to carry it?" asked Gregory.

"I don't know. It seems heavy."

"Open the gate, you blind devil!" cried Uncle Michael angrily.

And Uncle Jaakov said:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Vanka. You are stronger than the two of us together."

But Gregory, throwing open the gate, persisted in advising Ivan:

"Take care you don't break down! Go, and may God be with you!"

"Bald-headed fool!" cried Uncle Michael, from the street.

All the people in the yard, meanwhile, laughed and talked loudly, as if they were glad to get rid of the cross.

Gregory Ivanovitch took my hand and led me to the workshop, saying kindly:

"Perhaps, under the circumstances, grandfather won't thrash you to-day."

He sat me on a pile of woolens ready for dyeing, carefully wrapping them round me as high as my shoulders; and inhaling the vapor which rose from the vats, he said thoughtfully:

"I have known your grandfather for thirty-seven years, my dear. I saw his business at its commencement, and I shall see the end of it. We were friends then—in fact, we started and planned out the business together. He is a clever man, is your grandfather! He meant to be master, but I did not know it. However, God is more clever than any of us. He has only to smile and the wisest man will blink like a fool. You don't understand yet all that is said and done, but you must learn to understand everything. An orphan's life is a hard one. Your father, Maxim Savatyevitch, was a trump. He was well-educated too. That is why your grandfather did not like him, and would have nothing to do with him."

It was pleasant to listen to these kind words and to watch the red and gold flames playing in the stove,

and the milky cloud of steam which rose from the vats and settled like a dark blue rime on the slanting boards of the roof, through the uneven chinks of which the sky could be seen, like strands of blue ribbon. The wind had fallen; the yard looked as if it were strewn with glassy dust; the sledges gave forth a sharp sound as they passed up the street; a blue smoke rose from the chimneys of the house; faint shadows glided over the snow . . . also telling a story.

Lean, long-limbed Gregory, bearded and hatless, large-eared, just like a good-natured wizard, stirred the boiling dye, instructing me the while.

"Look every one straight in the eyes. And if a dog should fly at you, do the same; he will let you alone then."

His heavy spectacles pressed on the bridge of his nose, the tip of which was blue like grandmother's—and for the same reason.

"What is that?" he exclaimed suddenly, listening; then closing the door of the stove with his foot, he ran, or rather hopped, across the yard, and I dashed after him. In the middle of the kitchen floor lay Tsiganok, face upwards; broad streaks of light from the window fell on his head, his chest, and on his feet. His forehead shone strangely; his eyebrows were raised; his squinting eyes gazed intently at the blackened ceiling; a red-flecked foam bubbled from

his discolored lips, from the corners of which also flowed blood over his cheeks, his neck, and on to the floor; and a thick stream of blood crept from under his back. His legs were spread out awkwardly, and it was plain that his trousers were wet; they clung damply to the boards, which had been polished with sand, and shone like the sun. The rivulets of blood intersected the streams of light, and, showing up very vividly, flowed towards the threshold.

Tsiganok was motionless, except for the fact that as he lay with his hands alongside his body, his fingers scratched at the floor, and his stained fingernails shone in the sunlight.

Nyanya Eugenia, crouching beside him, put a slender candle into his hand, but he could not hold it and it fell to the floor, the wick being drenched in blood. Nyanya Eugenia picked it up and wiped it dry, and made another attempt to fix it in those restless fingers. A gentle whispering made itself heard in the kitchen; it seemed to blow me away from the door like the wind, but I held firmly to the doorpost.

"He stumbled!" Uncle Jaakov was explaining, in a colorless voice, shuddering and turning his head about. His face was gray and haggard; his eyes had lost their color, and blinked incessantly. "He fell, and it fell on top of him . . . and hit him on the

back. We should have been disabled if we had not dropped the cross in time."

"This is your doing," said Gregory dully.

"But how . . . ?"

"*You* did it!"

All this time the blood was flowing, and by the door had already formed a pool which seemed to grow darker and deeper. With another effusion of blood-flecked foam, Tsiganok roared out as if he were dreaming, and then collapsed, seeming to grow flatter and flatter, as if he were glued to the floor, or sinking through it.

"Michael went on horseback to the church to find father," whispered Uncle Jaakov, "and I brought him here in a cab as quickly as I could. It is a good job that I was not standing under the arms myself, or I should have been like this."

Nyanya Eugenia again fixed the candle in Tsiganok's hand, dropping wax and tears in his palm.

"That 's right! Glue his head to the floor, you careless creature," said Gregory gruffly and rudely.

"What do you mean?"

"Why don't you take off his cap?"

Nyanya dragged Ivan's cap from his head, which struck dully on the floor. Then it fell to one side and the blood flowed profusely from one side of his mouth only. This went on for a terribly long time. At first

I expected Tsiganok to sit up on the floor with a sigh, and say sleepily, "Phew! It is baking hot!" as he used to do after dinner on Sundays.

But he did not rise; on the contrary he seemed to be sinking into the ground. The sun had withdrawn from him now; its bright beams had grown shorter, and fell only on the window-sill. His whole form grew darker; his fingers no longer moved; the froth had disappeared from his lips. Round his head three candles stood out from the darkness, waving their golden flames, lighting up his dishevelled blue-black hair, and throwing quivering yellow ripples on his swarthy cheek, illuminating the tip of his pointed nose and his blood-stained teeth.

Nyanya, kneeling at his side, shed tears as she lisped: "My little dove! My bird of consolation!"

It was painfully cold. I crept under the table and hid myself there. Then grandfather came tumbling into the kitchen, in his coat of racoon fur; with him came grandmother in a cloak with a fur collar, Uncle Michael, the children, and many people not belonging to the house.

Throwing his coat on the floor, grandfather cried:

"Riff-raff! See what you have done for me, between you, in your carelessness! He would have been worth his weight in gold in five years—that's certain!"

The coats which had been thrown on the floor hindered me from seeing Ivan, so I crept out and knocked myself against grandfather's legs. He hurled me to one side, as he shook his little red fist threateningly at my uncles.

"You wolves!"

He sat down on a bench, and resting his arms upon it, burst into dry sobs, and said in a shrill voice:

"I know all about it! . . . He stuck in your gizzards! That was it! Oh, Vaniushka, poor fool! What have they done to you, eh? 'Rotten reins are good enough for a stranger's horse!' Mother! God has not loved us for the last year, has He? Mother!"

Grandmother, doubled up on the floor, was feeling Ivan's hands and chest, breathing upon his eyes, holding his hands and chafing them. Then, throwing down all the candles, she rose with difficulty to her feet, looking very somber in her shiny black frock, and with her eyes dreadfully wide open, she said in a low voice: "Go, accursed ones!"

All, with the exception of grandfather, straggled out of the kitchen.

Tsiganok was buried without fuss, and was soon forgotten.

CHAPTER IV

I WAS lying in a wide bed, with a thick blanket folded four times around me, listening to grandmother, who was saying her prayers. She was on her knees; and pressing one hand against her breast, she reverently crossed herself from time to time with the other. Out in the yard a hard frost reigned; a greenish moonlight peeped through the ice patterns on the window-panes, falling flatteringly on her kindly face and large nose, and kindling a phosphorescent light in her dark eyes. Her silky, luxuriant tresses were lit up as if by a furnace; her dark dress rustled, falling in ripples from her shoulders and spreading about her on the floor.

When she had finished her prayers grandmother undressed in silence, carefully folding up her clothes and placing them on the trunk in the corner. Then she came to bed. I pretended to be fast asleep.

"You are not asleep, you rogue, you are only making believe," she said softly. "Come, my duck, let 's have some bedclothes!"

Foreseeing what would happen, I could not repress a smile, upon seeing which she cried: "So this is how

you trick your old grandmother?" And taking hold of the blanket she drew it towards her with so much force and skill that I bounced up in the air, and turning over and over fell back with a squash into the soft feather bed, while she said with a chuckle: "What is it, little Hop o' my Thumb? Have you been bitten by a mosquito?"

But sometimes she prayed for such a long time that I really did fall asleep, and did not hear her come to bed.

The longer prayers were generally the conclusion of a day of trouble, or a day of quarreling and fighting; and it was very interesting to listen to them. Grandmother gave to God a circumstantial account of all that had happened in the house. Bowed down, looking like a great mound, she knelt, at first whispering rapidly and indistinctly, then hoarsely muttering:

"O Lord, Thou knowest that all of us wish to do better. Michael, the elder, ought to have been set up in the town—it will do him harm to be on the river; and the other is a new neighborhood and not overdone. I don't know what will come of it all! There 's father now. Jaakov is his favorite. Can't it be right to love one child more than the others? He is an obstinate old man; do Thou, O Lord, teach him!"

Gazing at the dark-featured icon, with her large, brilliant eyes, she thus counseled God:

"Send him a good dream, O Lord, to make him understand how he ought to treat his children!"

After prostrating herself and striking her broad forehead on the floor, she again straightened herself, and said coaxingly:

"And send Varvara some happiness! How has she displeased Thee? Is she more sinful than the others? Why should a healthy young woman be so afflicted? And remember Gregory, O Lord! His eyes are getting worse and worse. If he goes blind he will be sent adrift. That will be terrible! He has used up all his strength for grandfather, but do you think it likely that grandfather will help him? O Lord! Lord!"

She remained silent for a long time, with her head bowed meekly, and her hands hanging by her sides, as still as if she had fallen asleep, or had been suddenly frozen.

"What else is there?" she asked herself aloud, wrinkling her brows.

"O Lord, save all the faithful! Pardon me—accursed fool as I am!—Thou knowest that I do not sin out of malice but out of stupidity." And drawing a deep breath she would say lovingly and contentedly: "Son of God, Thou knowest all! Father, Thou seest all things."

I was very fond of grandmother's God Who seemed so near to her, and I often said:

"Tell me something about God."

She used to speak about Him in a peculiar manner —very quietly, strangely drawing out her words, closing her eyes; and she made a point of always sitting down and arranging her head-handkerchief very deliberately before she began.

"God's seat is on the hills, amidst the meadows of Paradise; it is an altar of sapphires under silver linden trees which flower all the year round, for in Paradise there is no winter, nor even autumn, and the flowers never wither, for joy is the divine favor. And round about God many angels fly like flakes of snow; and it may be even that bees hum there, and white doves fly between Heaven and earth, telling God all about us and everybody. And here on earth you and I and grandfather each has been given an angel. God treats us all equally. For instance, your angel will go and tell God: 'Lexei put his tongue out at grandfather.' And God says: 'All right, let the old man whip him.' And so it is with all of us; God gives to all what they deserve—to some grief, to others joy. And so all is right that He does, and the angels rejoice, and spread their wings and sing to Him without ceasing: 'Glory be unto Thee, O God; Glory be unto Thee.' And He just smiles on them, and it is enough for them—and more." And she would smile herself, shaking her head from side to side.

"Have you seen that?"

"No, I have not seen it, but I know."

When she spoke about God, or Heaven, or the angels, she seemed to shrink in size; her face grew younger, and her liquid eyes emitted a curious warm radiance. I used to take her heavy, satiny plait in my hands, and wind it round my neck as I sat quite still and listened to the endless but never tedious story.

"It is not given to men to see God—their sight is dim! Only the saints may look upon Him face to face. But I have seen angels myself; they reveal themselves sometimes to souls in a state of grace. I was standing in church at an early Mass, and I saw two moving about the altar like clouds. One could see everything, through them, growing brighter and brighter, and their gossamer-like wings touched the floor. They moved about the altar, helping old Father Elia, and supporting his elbows as he raised his feeble hands in prayer. He was very old, and being almost blind, stumbled frequently; but that day he got through the Mass quickly, and was finished early. When I saw them I nearly died of joy. My heart seemed as if it would burst; my tears ran down. Ah, how beautiful it was! Oh, Lenka, dear heart, where God is—whether in Heaven or earth—all goes well."

"But you don't mean to say that everything goes well here—in our house?"

Making the sign of the cross grandmother answered:

"Our Lady be praised—everything goes well."

This irritated me. I could not agree that things were going well in our household. From my point of view they were becoming more and more intolerable.

One day, as I passed the door of Uncle Michael's room I saw Aunt Natalia, not fully dressed, with her hands folded on her breast, pacing up and down like a creature distraught, and moaning, not loudly, but in a tone of agony:

"My God, take me under Thy protection! Remove me from here!"

I could sympathize with her prayer as well as I could understand Gregory when he growled:

"As soon as I am quite blind they will turn me out to beg; it will be better than this, anyhow."

And I wished that he would make haste and go blind, for I meant to seize the opportunity to go away with him so that we could start begging together. I had already mentioned the matter to Gregory, and he had replied, smiling in his beard:

"That 's right! We will go together. But I shall show myself in the town. There 's a grandson of Vassili Kashmirin's there—his daughter's son; he may give me something to do."

More than once I noticed a blue swelling under the

sunken eyes of Aunt Natalia; and sometimes a swollen lip was thrown into relief by her yellow face.

"Does Uncle Michael beat her, then?" I asked grandmother. And she answered with a sigh:

"Yes, he beats her, but not very hard—the devil! Grandfather does not object so long as he does it at night. He is ill-natured, and she—she is like a jelly!

"But he does not beat her as much as he used to," she continued in a more cheerful tone. "He just gives her a blow on the mouth, or boxes her ears, or drags her about by the hair for a minute or so; but at one time he used to torture her for hours together. Grandfather beat me one Easter Day from dinner-time till bed-time. He kept on; he just stopped to get his breath sometimes, and then started again. And he used a strap too!"

"But why did he do it?"

"I forget now. Another time he knocked me about till I was nearly dead, and then kept me without food for five hours. I was hardly alive when he had finished with me."

I was thunderstruck. Grandmother was twice as big as grandfather, and it was incredible that he should be able to get the better of her like this.

"Is he stronger than you, then?" I asked.

"Not stronger, but older. Besides, he is my hus-

band, he has to answer for me to God; but my duty is to suffer patiently."

It was an interesting and pleasing sight to see her dusting the icon and cleaning its ornamentation; it was richly adorned with pearls, silver and colored gems in the crown, and as she took it gently in her hands she gazed at it with a smile, and said in a tone of feeling:

"See what a sweet face it is!" And crossing herself and kissing it, she went on: "Dusty art thou, and begrimed, Mother, Help of Christians, Joy of the Elect! Look, Lenia, darling, how small the writing is, and what tiny characters they are; and yet it is all quite distinct. It is called 'The Twelve Holy-Days,' and in the middle you see the great Mother of God by predestination immaculate; and here is written: 'Mourn not for me, Mother, because I am about to be laid in the grave.' "

Sometimes it seemed to me as if she played with the icon as earnestly and seriously as my Cousin Ekaterina with her doll.

She often saw devils, sometimes several together, sometimes one alone.

"One clear moonlight night, during the great Fast, I was passing the Rudolphovs' house, and looking up I saw, on the roof, a devil sitting close to the chimney! He was all black, and he was holding his horned head over the top of the chimney and sniffing vigorously.

There he sat sniffing and grunting, the great, unwieldy creature, with his tail on the roof, scraping with his feet all the time. I made the sign of the Cross at him and said: 'Christ is risen from the dead, and His enemies are scattered.' At that he gave a low howl and slipped head over heels from the roof to the yard—so *he* was scattered! They must have been cooking meat at the Rudolphovs' that day, and he was enjoying the smell of it."

I laughed at her picture of the devil flying head over heels off the roof, and she laughed too as she said:

"They are as fond of playing tricks as children. One day I was doing the washing in the washhouse and it was getting late, when suddenly the door of the little room burst open and in rushed lots of little red, green and black creatures like cockroaches, and all sizes, and spread themselves all over the place. I flew towards the door, but I could not get past; there I was unable to move hand or foot amongst a crowd of devils! They filled the whole place so that I could not turn round. They crept about my feet, plucked at my dress, and crowded round me so that I had not even room to cross myself. Shaggy, and soft, and warm, somewhat resembling cats, though they walked on their hind legs, they went round and round me, peering into everything, showing their teeth like mice, blinking their small green

eyes, almost piercing me with their horns, and sticking out their little tails—they were like pigs' tails. Oh, my dear! I seemed to be going out of my mind. And did n't they push me about too! The candle nearly went out, the water in the copper became luke-warm, the washing was all thrown about the floor. Ah! your very breath was trouble and sorrow."

Closing my eyes, I could visualize the threshold of the little chamber with its gray cobble-stones, and the unclean stream of shaggy creatures of diverse colors which gradually filled the washhouse. I could see them blowing out the candle and thrusting out their impudent pink tongues. It was a picture both comical and terrifying.

Grandmother was silent a minute, shaking her head, before she burst out again:

"And I saw some fiends too, one wintry night, when it was snowing. I was coming across the Dinkov Causeway—the place where, if you remember, your Uncle Michael and your Uncle Jaakov tried to drown your father in an ice-hole—and I was just going to take the lower path, when there came the sounds of hissing and hooting, and I looked up and saw a team of three raven-black horses tearing towards me. On the coachman's place stood a great fat devil, in a red nightcap, with protruding teeth. He was holding the reins, made of forged iron chains, with outstretched arms, and as

there was no way round, the horses flew right over the pond, and were hidden by a cloud of snow. All those sitting in the sledge behind were devils too; there they sat, hissing and screaming and waving their nightcaps. In all, seven troikas like this tore by, as if they had been fire-engines, all with black horses, and all carrying a load of thoroughbred devils. They pay visits to each other, you know, and drive about in the night to their different festivities. I expect that was a devil's wedding that I saw."

One had to believe grandmother, because she spoke so simply and convincingly.

But the best of all her stories was the one which told how Our Lady went about the suffering earth, and how she commanded the woman-brigand, or the "Amazon-chief" Engalichev, not to kill or rob Russian people. And after that came the stories about Blessed Alexei; about Ivan the Warrior, and Vassili the Wise; of the Priest Kozlya, and the beloved child of God; and the terrible stories of Martha Posadnitz, of Baba Ustye the robber chief, of Mary the sinner of Egypt, and of sorrowing mothers of robber sons. The fairy-tales, and stories of old times, and the poems which she knew were without number.

She feared no one—neither grandfather, nor devils, nor any of the powers of evil; but she was terribly afraid of black cockroaches, and could feel their pres-

ence when they were a long way from her. Sometimes she would wake me in the night whispering:

"Oleysha, dear, there is a cockroach crawling about. Do get rid of it, for goodness' sake."

Half-asleep, I would light the candle and creep about on the floor seeking the enemy—a quest in which I did not always succeed at once.

"No, there 's not a sign of one," I would say; but lying quite still with her head muffled up in the bedclothes, she would entreat me in a faint voice:

"Oh, yes, there is one there! Do look again, *please*. I am sure there is one about somewhere."

And she was never mistaken. Sooner or later I found the cockroach, at some distance from the bed; and throwing the blanket off her she would breathe a sigh of relief and smile as she said:

"Have you killed it? Thank God! Thank you."

If I did not succeed in discovering the insect, she could not go to sleep again, and I could feel how she trembled in the silence of the night; and I heard her whisper breathlessly:

"It is by the door. Now it has crawled under the trunk."

"Why are you so frightened of cockroaches?"

"I don't know myself," she would answer, reasonably enough. "It is the way the horrid black things crawl about. God has given a meaning to all other vermin:

woodlice show that the house is damp; bugs mean that the walls are dirty; lice foretell an illness, as every one knows; but these creatures!—who knows what powers they possess, or what they live on?"

. . . . . .

One day when she was on her knees, conversing earnestly with God, grandfather, throwing open the door, shouted hoarsely:

"Well, Mother, God has afflicted us again. We are on fire."

"What are you talking about?" cried grandmother, jumping up from the floor; and they both rushed into the large parlor, making a great noise with their feet. "Eugenia, take down the icons. Natalia, dress the baby."

Grandmother gave her orders in a stern voice of authority, but all grandfather did was to mutter: "Ug—h!"

I ran into the kitchen. The window looking on to the yard shone like gold, and yellow patches of light appeared on the floor, and Uncle Jaakov, who was dressing, trod on them with his bare feet, and jumped about as if they had burned him, shrieking:

"This is Mischka's doing. He started the fire, and then went out."

"Peace, cur!" said grandmother, pushing him towards the door so roughly that he nearly fell.

Through the frost on the window-panes the burning roof of the workshop was visible, with the curling flames pouring out from its open door. It was a still night, and the color of the flames was not spoiled by any admixture of smoke; while just above them hovered a dark cloud which, however, did not hide from our sight the silver stream of the Mlethchna Road. The snow glittered with a livid brilliance, and the walls of the house tottered and shook from side to side, as if about to hurl themselves into that burning corner of the yard where the flames disported themselves so gaily as they poured through the broad red cracks in the walls of the workshop, dragging crooked, red-hot nails out with them. Gold and red ribbons wound themselves about the dark beams of the roof, and soon enveloped it entirely; but the slender chimney-pot stood up straight in the midst of it all, belching forth clouds of smoke. A gentle crackling sound like the rustle of silk beat against our windows, and all the time the flames were spreading till the workshop, adorned by them, as it were, looked like the iconostasis in church, and became more and more attractive to me.

Throwing a heavy fur coat over my head and thrusting my feet into the first boots that came handy, I ran out to the porch and stood on the steps, stupefied and blinded by the brilliant play of light, dazed by the yells of my grandfather, and uncles, and Gregory, and

alarmed by grandmother's behavior, for she had wrapped an empty sack round her head, enveloped her body in a horse-cloth, and was running straight into the flames. She disappeared, crying, "The vitriol, you fools! It will explode!"

"Keep her back, Gregory!" roared grandfather. "Aie! she 's done for—!"

But grandmother reappeared at this moment, blackened with smoke, half-fainting, bent almost double over the bottle of vitriolic oil which she was carrying in her stretched-out hands.

"Father, get the horse out!" she cried hoarsely, coughing and spluttering, "and take this thing off my shoulders. Can't you see it is on fire?"

Gregory dragged the smoldering horse-cloth from her shoulders, and then, working hard enough for two men, went on shoveling large lumps of snow into the door of the workshop. My uncle jumped about him with an ax in his hands, while grandfather ran round grandmother, throwing snow over her; then she put the bottle into a snowdrift, and ran to the gate, where there were a great many people gathered together. After greeting them, she said:

"Save the warehouse, neighbors! If the fire fastens upon the warehouse and the hay-loft, we shall be burnt out; and it will spread to your premises. Go and pull

off the roof and drag the hay into the garden! Gregory, why don't you throw some of the snow on top, instead of throwing it all on the ground? Now, Jaakov, don't dawdle about! Give some axes and spades to these good folk. Dear neighbors, behave like true friends, and may God reward you!"

She was quite as interesting to me as the fire. Illuminated by those flames which had so nearly devoured her, she rushed about the yard—a black figure, giving assistance at all points, managing the whole thing, and letting nothing escape her attention.

Sharapa ran into the yard, rearing and nearly throwing grandfather down. The light fell on his large eyes which shone expressively; he breathed heavily as his forefeet pawed the air, and grandfather let the reins fall, and jumping aside called out: "Catch hold of him, Mother!"

She threw herself almost under the feet of the rearing horse, and stood in front of him, with outstretched arms in the form of a cross; the animal neighed pitifully and let himself be drawn towards her, swerving aside at the flames.

"Now, you are not frightened," said grandmother in a low voice, as he patted his neck and grasped the reins, "Do you think I would leave you when you are in such a state? Oh, you silly little mouse!"

And the little "mouse," who was twice as large as herself, submissively went to the gate with her, snuffling, and gazing at her red face.

Nyanya Eugenia had brought some muffled-up youngsters, who were bellowing in smothered tones, from the house.

"Vassili Vassilitch," she cried, "we can't find Alexei anywhere!"

"Go away! Go away!" answered grandfather, waving his hands, and I hid myself under the stairs so that Nyanya should not take me away.

The roof of the workshop had fallen in by this time, and the stanchions, smoking, and glittering like golden coal, stood out against the sky. With a howl and a crash a green, blue and red tornado burst inside the building, and the flames threw themselves with a new energy on the yard and on the people who were gathered round and throwing spadefuls of snow on the huge bonfire.

The heat caused the vats to boil furiously; a thick cloud of steam and smoke arose, and a strange odor, which caused one's eyes to water, floated into the yard. I crept out from beneath the stairs and got under grandmother's feet.

"Get away!" she shrieked. "You will get trampled on. Get away!"

At this moment a man on horseback, with a copper helmet, burst into the yard. His roan-colored horse was covered with froth, and he raised a whip high above his head and shouted threateningly:

"Make way there!"

Bells rang out hurriedly and gaily; it was just as beautiful as a festival day.

Grandmother pushed me back towards the steps.

"What did I tell you? Go away!"

I could not disobey her at such a time, so I went back to the kitchen and glued myself once more to the window; but I could not see the fire through that dense mass of people—I could see nothing but the gleam of copper helmets amongst the winter caps of fur.

In a short time the fire was got under, totally extinguished, and the building submerged. The police drove the onlookers away, and grandmother came into the kitchen.

"Who is this? Oh, it is you! Why are n't you in bed? Frightened, eh? There 's nothing to be frightened about; it is all over now."

She sat beside me in silence, shaking a little. The return of the quiet night with its darkness was a relief. Presently grandfather came in, and standing in the doorway said:

"Mother?"

"Yes?"

"Were you burned?"

"A little—nothing to speak of."

He lit a brimstone match, which lit up his soot-begrimed face, looked for and found the candle on the table, and then came over swiftly and sat beside grandmother.

"The best thing we can do is to wash ourselves," she said, for she was covered with soot too, and smelt of acrid smoke.

"Sometimes," said grandfather, drawing a deep breath, "God is pleased to endue you with great good-sense." And stroking her shoulder he added with a grin: "Only sometimes, you know, just for an hour or so; but there it is all the same."

Grandmother smiled too, and began to say something, but grandfather stopped her, frowning:

"We shall have to get rid of Gregory. All this trouble has been caused by his neglect. His working days are over. He is worn out. That fool Jaaschka is sitting on the stairs crying; you had better go to him."

She stood up and went out, holding her hand up to her face and blowing on her fingers; and grandfather, without looking at me, asked softly:

"You saw it all from the beginning of the fire, did n't you? Then you saw how grandmother behaved,

did n't you? And that is an old woman, mind you!—crushed and breaking-up—and yet you see—! U—ugh, *you!*"

After a long silence, during which he sat huddled up, he rose and snuffed the candle, as he asked me:

"Were you frightened?"

"No."

"Quite right! There was nothing to be frightened about."

Irritably dragging his shirt from his shoulder, he went to the washstand in the corner, and I could hear him in the darkness stamping his feet as he exclaimed:

"A fire is a silly business. The person who causes a fire ought to be beaten in the market-place. He must be either a fool or a thief. If that was done there would be no more fires. Go away now, and go to bed! What are you sitting there for?"

I did as he told me, but sleep was denied to me that night. I had no sooner laid myself down when an unearthly howl greeted me, which seemed to come from the bed. I rushed back to the kitchen, in the middle of which stood grandfather, shirtless, holding a candle which flickered violently as he stamped his feet on the floor, crying:

"Mother! Jaakov! What is that?"

I jumped on the stove and hid myself in a corner, and the household was once more in a state of wild

commotion; a heartrending howl beat against the ceiling and walls, increasing in sound every moment.

It was all just the same as it had been during the fire. Grandfather and uncle ran about aimlessly; grandmother shouted as she drove them away from one place to another; Gregory made a great noise as he thrust logs into the stove and filled the iron kettle with water. He went about the kitchen bobbing his head just like an Astrakhan camel.

"Heat the stove first," said grandmother in a tone of authority.

He rushed to do her bidding, and fell over my legs.

"Who is there?" he cried, greatly flustered. "Phew! How you frightened me! You are always where you ought not to be."

"What has happened?"

"Aunt Natalia has had a little baby born to her," he replied calmly, jumping down to the floor.

I remembered that my mother had not screamed like that when her little baby was born.

Having placed the kettle over the fire, Gregory climbed up to me on the stove, and drawing a long pipe from his pocket, showed it to me.

"I am taking to a pipe for the good of my eyes," he explained. "Grandmother advised me to take snuff, but I think smoking will do me more good."

He sat on the edge of the stove with his legs crossed,

looking down at the feeble light of the candle; his ears and cheeks were smothered in soot, one side of his shirt was torn, and I could see his ribs—as broad as the ribs of a cask. One of his eyeglasses was broken; almost half of the glass had come out of the frame, and from the empty space peered a red, moist eye, which had the appearance of a wound.

Filling his pipe with coarse-cut tobacco, he listened to the groans of the travailing woman, and murmured disjointedly, like a drunken man:

"That grandmother of yours has burned herself so badly that I am sure I don't know how she can attend to the poor creature. Just hear how your aunt is groaning. You know, they forgot all about her. She was taken bad when the fire first broke out. It was fright that did it. You see what pain it costs to bring children into the world, and yet women are thought nothing of! But, mark my words—women ought to be thought a lot of, for they are the mothers—"

Here I dozed, and was awakened by a tumult: a banging of doors, and the drunken cries of Uncle Michael; these strange words floated to my ears:

"The royal doors must be opened—!"

"Give her holy oil with rum, half a glass of oil, half a glass of rum, and a tablespoonful of soot—"

Then Uncle Michael kept asking like a tiresome child:

"Let me have a look at her!"

He sat on the floor with his legs sprawling, and kept spitting straight in front of him, and banging his hands on the floor.

I began to find the stove unbearably hot, so I slid down, but when I got on a level with uncle he seized and held me by the legs, and I fell on the back of my head.

"Fool!" I exclaimed.

He jumped to his feet, grabbed me again, and roared:

"I 'll smash you against the stove—"

I escaped to a corner of the best parlor, under the image, and ran against grandfather's knees; he put me aside, and gazing upwards, went on in a low voice:

"There is no excuse for any of us—"

The image-lamp burned brightly over his head, a candle stood on the table in the middle of the room, and the light of a foggy winter's morning was already peeping in at the window.

Presently he bent towards me, and asked:

"What 's the matter with you?"

Everything was the matter with me—my head was clammy, my body sorely weary; but I did not like to say so because everything about me was so strange. Almost all the chairs in the room were occupied by strangers; there were a priest in a lilac-colored robe,

a gray-headed old man with glasses, in a military uniform, and many other people who all sat quite still like wooden figures, or figures frozen, as it were, in expectation of something, and listened to the sound of water splashing somewhere near. By the door stood Uncle Jaakov, very upright, with his hands behind his back. "Here!" said grandfather to him, "take this child to bed."

My uncle beckoned me to follow him, and led the way on tiptoe to the door of grandmother's room, and when I had got into bed he whispered:

"Your Aunt Natalia is dead."

I was not surprised to hear it. She had not been visible for a long time, either in the kitchen or at meals.

"Where is grandmother?" I asked.

"Down there," he replied, waving his hand, and went out of the room, still going softly on his bare feet.

I lay in bed and looked about me. I seemed to see hairy, gray, sightless faces pressed against the window-pane, and though I knew quite well that those were grandmother's clothes hanging over the box in the corner, I imagined that some living creature was hiding there and waiting. I put my head under the pillow, leaving one eye uncovered so that I could look at the door, and wished that I dared jump out of bed and run out of the room. It was very hot, and there was a

heavy, stifling odor which reminded me of the night when Tsiganok died, and that rivulet of blood ran along the floor.

Something in my head or my heart seemed to be swelling; everything that I had seen in that house seemed to stretch before my mind's eye, like a train of winter sledges in the street, and to rise up and crush me.

The door opened very slowly, and grandmother crept into the room, and closing the door with her shoulder, came slowly forward; and holding out her hand to the blue light of the image-lamp, wailed softly, pitifully as a child:

"Oh, my poor little hand! My poor hand hurts me so!"

CHAPTER V

BEFORE long another nightmare began. One evening when we had finished tea and grandfather and I sat over the Psalter, while grandmother was washing up the cups and saucers, Uncle Jaakov burst into the room, as dishevelled as ever, and bearing a strange resemblance to one of the household brooms. Without greeting us, he tossed his cap into a corner and began speaking rapidly, with excited gestures.

"Mischka is kicking up an utterly uncalled-for row. He had dinner with me, drank too much, and began to show unmistakable signs of being out of his mind; he broke up the crockery, tore up an order which had just been completed—it was a woolen dress—broke the windows, insulted me and Gregory, and now he is coming here, threatening you. He keeps shouting, 'I'll pull father's beard for him! I'll kill him!' so you had better look out."

Grandfather rose slowly to his feet, resting his hands on the table. He was frowning heavily, and his face seemed to dry up, growing narrow and cruel, like a hatchet.

"Do you hear that, Mother?" he yelled. "What do

you think of it, eh? Our own son coming to kill his father! But it is quite time; it is quite time, my children."

He went up the room, straightening his shoulders, to the door, sharply snapped the heavy iron hook, which fastened it, into its ring, and turned again to Uncle Jaakov saying:

"This is all because you want to get hold of Varvara's dowry. That's what it is!"

And he laughed derisively in the face of my uncle, who asked in an offended tone:

"What should *I* want with it?"

"You? I know you!"

Grandmother was silent as she hastily put the cups and saucers away in the cupboard.

"Well?" cried grandfather, laughing bitterly. "Very good! Thank you, my son. Mother, give this fox a poker, or an iron if you like. Now, Jaakov Vassilev, when your brother breaks in, kill him before my eyes!"

My uncle thrust his hands into his pockets and retired into a corner.

"Of course, if you won't believe me—"

"Believe you?" cried grandfather, stamping his feet. "No! I'll believe an animal—a dog, a hedgehog even—but I have no faith in you. I know you too well. You made him drunk, and then gave him his in-

structions. Very well! What are you waiting for? Kill me now—him or me, you can take your choice!"

Grandmother whispered to me softly: "Run upstairs and look out of the window, and when you see Uncle Michael coming along the street, hurry back and tell us. Run along now! Make haste!"

A little frightened by the threatened invasion of my turbulent uncles, but proud of the confidence placed in me, I leaned out of the window which looked out upon the broad road, now thickly coated with dust through which the lumpy, rough cobblestones were just visible. The street stretched a long way to the left, and crossing the causeway continued to Ostrojni Square, where, firmly planted on the clay soil, stood a gray building with a tower at each of its four corners—the old prison, about which there was a suggestion of melancholy beauty. On the right, about three houses away, there was an opening in Syenia Square, which was built round the yellow domicile of the prison officials, and on the leaden-colored fire-tower, on the look-out gallery of the tower, revolved the figures of the watchmen, looking like dogs on chains. The whole square was cut off from the causeway—at one end stood a green thicket, and, more to the right, lay the stagnant Dinka Pond, into which, so grandmother used to tell the story, my uncles had thrown my father one winter, with the intention of drowning him. Almost opposite our

windows was a lane of small houses of various colors which led to the dumpy, squat church of the "Three Apostles." If you looked straight at it the roof appeared exactly like a boat turned upside down on the green waves of the garden. Defaced by the snow-storms of a long winter, washed by the continuous rains of autumn, the discolored houses in our street were powdered with dust. They seemed to look at each other with half-closed eyes, like beggars in the church porch, and, like me, they seemed to be waiting for some one, and their open windows had an air of suspicion.

There were a few people moving about the street in a leisurely manner, like thoughtful cockroaches on a warm hearth; a suffocating heat rose up to me, and the detestable odor of pie and carrots and onions cooking forced itself upon me—a smell which always made me feel melancholy.

I was very miserable—ridiculously, intolerably miserable! My breast felt as if it were full of warm lead which pressed from within and exuded through my ribs. I seemed to feel myself inflating like a bladder, and yet there I was, compressed into that tiny room, under a coffin-shaped ceiling.

There was Uncle Michael—peeping from the lane round the corner of the gray houses. He tried to pull his cap down over his ears, but they stuck out all the same. He was wearing a brown pea-jacket and high

boots which were very dusty; one hand was in the pocket of his check trousers, and with the other he tugged at his beard. I could not see his face, but he stood almost as if he were prepared to dart across the road and seize grandfather's house in his rough, black hands. I ought to have run downstairs to say that he had come, but I could not tear myself away from the window, and I waited till I saw my uncle kick the dust about over his gray boots just as if he were afraid, and then cross the road. I heard the door of the wineshop creak, and its glass panels rattle as he opened it, before I ran downstairs and knocked at grandfather's door.

"Who is it?" he asked gruffly, making no attempt to let me in. "Oh, it 's you! Well, what is it?"

"He has gone into the wineshop!"

"All right! Run along!"

"But I am frightened up there."

"I can't help that."

Again I stationed myself at the window. It was getting dark. The dust lay more thickly on the road, and looked almost black; yellow patches of light oozed out from the adjacent windows, and from the house opposite came strains of music played on several stringed instruments—melancholy but pleasing. There was singing in the tavern, too; when the door opened the sound of a feeble, broken voice floated out into the street. I recognized it as belonging to the

beggar cripple, Nikitoushka—a bearded ancient, with one glass eye and the other always tightly closed. When the door banged it sounded as if his song had been cut off with an ax.

Grandmother used to quite envy this beggar-man. After listening to his songs she used to say, with a sigh:

"There 's talent for you! What a lot of poetry he knows by heart. It 's a gift—that 's what it is!"

Sometimes she invited him into the yard, where he sat on the steps and sang, or told stories, while grandmother sat beside him and listened, with such exclamations as:

"Go on. Do you mean to tell me that Our Lady was ever at Ryazin?"

To which he would reply in a low voice which carried conviction with it:

"She went everywhere—through every province."

An elusive, dreamy lassitude seemed to float up to me from the street, and place its oppressive weight upon my heart and my eyes. I wished that grandmother would come to me—or even grandfather. I wondered what kind of a man my father had been that grandfather and my uncles disliked him so, while grandmother and Gregory and Nyanya Eugenia spoke so well of him. And where was my mother? I thought of her more and more every day, making her the center of all the fairy-tales and old legends related to

me by grandmother. The fact that she did not choose to live with her own family increased my respect for her. I imagined her living at an inn on a highroad, with robbers who waylaid rich travelers, and shared the spoils with beggars. Or it might be that she was living in a forest—in a cave, of course—with good robbers, keeping house for them, and taking care of their stolen gold. Or, again, she might be wandering about the earth reckoning up its treasures, as the robber-chieftainess Engalitchev went with Our Lady, who would say to her, as she said to the robber-chieftainess:

"Do not steal, O grasping slave,
The gold and silver from every cave;
Nor rob the earth of all its treasure
For thy greedy body's pleasure."

To which my mother would answer in the words of the robber-chieftainess:

"Pardon, Lady, Virgin Blest!
To my sinful soul give rest;
Not for myself the gold I take,
I do it for my young son's sake."

And Our Lady, good-natured, like grandmother, would pardon her, and say:

"Maroushka, Maroushka, of Tartar blood,
For you, luckless one, 'neath the Cross I stood;
Continue your journey and bear your load,
And scatter your tears o'er the toilsome road.

But with Russian people please do not meddle;
Waylay the Mongol in the woods
Or rob the Kalmuck of his goods."

Thinking of this story, I lived in it, as if it had been a dream. I was awakened by a trampling, a tumult, and howls from below—in the sheds and in the yard. I looked out of the window and saw grandfather, Uncle Jaakov, and a man employed by the tavern-keeper—the funny-looking bartender, Melyan—pushing Uncle Michael through the wicker-gate into the street. He hit out, but they struck him on the arms, the back, and the neck with their hands, and then kicked him. In the end he went flying headlong through the gate, and landed in the dusty road. The gate banged, the latch and the bolt rattled; all that remained of the fray was a much ill-used cap lying in the gateway, and all was quiet.

After lying still for a time, my uncle dragged himself to his feet, all torn and dishevelled, and picking up one of the cobblestones, hurled it at the gate with such a resounding clangor as might have been caused by a blow on the bottom of a cask. Shadowy people crept out of the tavern, shouting, cursing, gesticulating violently; heads were thrust out of the windows of the houses round; the street was alive with people, laughing and talking loudly. It was all like a story which aroused one's curiosity, but was at the same time un-

pleasant and full of horrors. Suddenly the whole thing was obliterated; the voices died away, and every one disappeared from my sight.

. . . . . .

On a box by the door sat grandmother, doubled up, motionless, hardly breathing. I went and stood close to her and stroked her warm, soft, wet cheeks, but she did not seem to feel my touch, as she murmured over and over again hoarsely:

"O God! have You no compassion left for me and my children? Lord! have mercy—!"

. . . . . .

It seems that grandfather had only lived in that house in Polevoi Street for a year—from one spring to another—yet during that time it had acquired an unpleasant notoriety. Almost every Sunday boys ran about our door, chanting gleefully:

"There 's another row going on at the Kashmirins!"

Uncle Michael generally put in an appearance in the evening and held the house in a state of siege all night, putting its occupants into a frenzy of fear: sometimes he was accompanied by two or three assistants—repulsive-looking loafers of the lowest class. They used to make their way unseen from the causeway to the garden, and, once there, they indulged their drunken whims to the top of their bent, stripping the raspberry and currant bushes, and sometimes making

a raid on the washhouse and breaking everything in it which could be broken—washing-stools, benches, kettles—smashing the stove, tearing up the flooring, and pulling down the framework of the door.

Grandfather, grim and mute, stood at the window listening to the noise made by these destroyers of his property; while grandmother, whose form could not be descried in the darkness, ran about the yard, crying in a voice of entreaty:

"Mischka! what are you thinking of? Mischka!"

For answer, a torrent of abuse in Russian, hideous as the ravings of a madman, was hurled at her from the garden by the brute, who was obviously ignorant of the meaning, and insensible to the effect of the words which he vomited forth.

I knew that I must not run after grandmother at such a time, and I was afraid to be alone, so I went down to grandfather's room; but directly he saw me, he cried:

"Get out! Curse you!"

I ran up to the garret and looked out on the yard and garden from the dormer-window, trying to keep grandmother in sight. I was afraid that they would kill her, and I screamed, and called out to her, but she did not come to me; only my drunken uncle, hearing my voice, abused my mother in furious and obscene language.

On one of these evenings grandfather was unwell, and as he uneasily moved his head, which was swathed in a towel, upon his pillow, he lamented shrilly:

"For this I have lived, and sinned, and heaped up riches! If it were not for the shame and disgrace of it, I would call in the police, and let them be taken before the Governor to-morrow. But look at the disgrace! What sort of parents are they who bring the law to bear on their children? Well, there 's nothing for you to do but to lie still under it, old man!"

He suddenly jumped out of bed, and went, staggeringly, to the window.

Grandmother caught his arm: "Where are you going?" she asked.

"Light up!" he said, breathing hard.

When grandmother had lit the candle, he took the candlestick from her, and holding it close to him, as a soldier would hold a gun, he shouted from the window in loud, mocking tones:

"Hi, Mischka! You burglar! You mangy, mad cur!"

Instantly the top pane of glass was shattered to atoms, and half a brick fell on the table beside grandmother.

"Why don't you aim straight?" shrieked grandfather hysterically.

Grandmother just took him in her arms, as she would

have taken me, and carried him back to bed, saying over and over again in a tone of terror:

"What are you thinking of? What are you thinking of? May God forgive you! I can see that Siberia will be the end of this for him. But in his madness he can't realize what Siberia would mean."

Grandfather moved his legs angrily, and sobbing dryly, said in a choked voice:

"Let him kill me—!"

From outside came howls, and the sound of trampling feet, and a scraping at walls. I snatched the brick from the table and ran to the window with it, but grandmother seized me in time, and hurling it into a corner, hissed:

"You little devil!"

Another time my uncle came armed with a thick stake, and broke into the vestibule of the house from the yard by breaking in the door as he stood on the top of the dark flight of steps. However, grandfather was waiting for him on the other side, stick in hand, with two of his tenants armed with clubs, and the tall wife of the innkeeper holding a rolling-pin in readiness. Grandmother came softly behind them, murmuring in tones of earnest entreaty:

"Let me go to him! Let me have one word with him!"

Grandfather was standing with one foot thrust for-

ward like the man with the spear in the picture called "The Bear Hunt." When grandmother ran to him, he said nothing, but pushed her away by a movement of his elbow and his foot. All four were standing in formidable readiness. Hanging on the wall above them was a lantern which cast an unflattering, spasmodic light on their countenances. I saw all this from the top staircase, and I was wishing all the time that I could fetch grandmother to be with me up there.

My uncle had carried out the operation of breaking in the door with vigor and success. It had slipped out of its place and was ready to spring out of the upper hinge—the lower one was already broken away and jangled discordantly.

Grandfather spoke to his companions-in-arms in a voice which repeated the same jarring sound:

"Go for his arms and legs, but let his silly head alone, please."

In the wall, at the side of the door, there was a little window, through which you could just put your head. Uncle had smashed the panes, and it looked, with the splinters sticking out all round it, like some one's black eye. To this window grandmother rushed, and putting her hand through into the yard, waved it warningly as she cried:

"Mischka! For Christ's sake go away; they will tear you limb from limb. Do go away!"

He struck at her with the stake he was holding. A broad object could be seen distinctly to pass the window and fall upon her hand, and following on this grandmother herself fell; but even as she lay on her back she managed to call out:

"Mischka! Mi—i—schka! Run!"

"Mother, where are you?" bawled grandfather in a terrific voice.

The door gave way, and framed in the black lintel stood my uncle; but a moment later he had been hurled, like a lump of mud off a spade, down the steps.

The wife of the innkeeper carried grandmother to grandfather's room, to which he soon followed her, asking morosely:

"Any bones broken?"

"Och! I should think every one of them was broken," replied grandmother, keeping her eyes closed. "What have you done with him? What have you done with him?"

"Have some sense!" exclaimed grandfather sternly. "Do you think I am a wild beast? He is lying in the cellar bound hand and foot, and I 've given him a good drenching with water. I admit it was a bad thing to do; but who caused the whole trouble?"

Grandmother groaned.

"I have sent for the bone-setter. Try and bear it till he comes," said grandfather, sitting beside her on

the bed. "They are ruining us, Mother—and in the shortest time possible."

"Give them what they ask for then."

"What about Varvara?"

They discussed the matter for a long time—grandmother quietly and pitifully, and grandfather in loud and angry tones.

Then a little, humpbacked old woman came, with an enormous mouth, extending from ear to ear; her lower jaw trembled, her mouth hung open like the mouth of a fish, and a pointed nose peeped over her upper lip. Her eyes were not visible. She hardly moved her feet as her crutches scraped along the floor, and she carried in her hand a bundle which rattled.

It seemed to me that she had brought death to grandmother, and darting at her I yelled with all my force:

"Go away!"

Grandfather seized me, not too gently, and, looking very cross, carried me to the attic.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the spring came my uncles separated—Jaakov remained in the town and Michael established himself by the river, while grandfather bought a large, interesting house in Polevoi Street, with a tavern on the ground-floor, comfortable little rooms under the roof, and a garden running down to the causeway which simply bristled with leafless willow branches.

"Canes for you!" grandfather said, merrily winking at me, as after looking at the garden, I accompanied him on the soft, slushy road. "I shall begin teaching you to read and write soon, so they will come in handy."

The house was packed full of lodgers, with the exception of the top floor, where grandfather had a room for himself and for the reception of visitors, and the attic, in which grandmother and I had established ourselves. Its window gave on to the street, and one could see, by leaning over the sill, in the evenings and on holidays, drunken men crawling out of the tavern and staggering up the road, shouting and tumbling

about. Sometimes they were thrown out into the road, just as if they had been sacks, and then they would try to make their way into the tavern again; the door would bang, and creak, and the hinges would squeak, and then a fight would begin. It was very interesting to look down on all this.

Every morning grandfather went to the workshops of his sons to help them to get settled, and every evening he would return tired, depressed, and cross.

Grandmother cooked, and sewed, and pottered about in the kitchen and flower gardens, revolving about something or other all day long, like a gigantic top set spinning by an invisible whip; taking snuff continually, and sneezing, and wiping her perspiring face as she said:

"Good luck to you, good old world! Well now, Oleysha, my darling, is n't this a nice quiet life now? This is thy doing, Queen of Heaven—that everything has turned out so well!"

But her idea of a quiet life was not mine. From morning till night the other occupants of the house ran in and out and up and down tumultuously, thus demonstrating their neighborliness—always in a hurry, yet always late; always complaining, and always ready to call out: "Akulina Ivanovna!"

And Akulina Ivanovna, invariably amiable, and impartially attentive to them all, would help herself to

snuff and carefully wipe her nose and fingers on a red check handkerchief before replying:

"To get rid of lice, my friend, you must wash yourself oftener and take baths of mint-vapor; but if the lice are under the skin, you should take a tablespoonful of the purest goose-grease, a teaspoonful of sulphur, three drops of quicksilver—stir all these ingredients together seven times with a potsherd in an earthenware vessel, and use the mixture as an ointment. But remember that if you stir it with a wooden or a bone spoon the mercury will be wasted, and that if you put a brass or silver spoon into it, it will do you harm to use it."

Sometimes, after consideration, she would say:

"You had better go to Asaph, the chemist at Petchyor, my good woman, for I am sure I don't know how to advise you."

She acted as midwife, and as peacemaker in family quarrels and disputes; she would cure infantile maladies, and recite the "Dream of Our Lady," so that the women might learn it by heart "for luck," and was always ready to give advice in matters of housekeeping.

"The cucumber itself will tell you when pickling time comes; when it falls to the ground and gives forth a curious odor, then is the time to pluck it. Kvass must be roughly dealt with, and it does not like much sweetness, so prepare it with raisins, to which you may

THE SHARING-OUT OF THE FAMILY GOODS

add one zolotnik to every two and a half gallons. . . . You can make curds in different ways. There 's the Donski flavor, and the Gimpanski, and the Caucasian."

All day long I hung about her in the garden and in the yard, and accompanied her to neighbors' houses, where she would sit for hours drinking tea and telling all sorts of stories. I had grown to be a part of her, as it were, and at this period of my life I do not remember anything so distinctly as that energetic old woman, who was never weary of doing good.

Sometimes my mother appeared on the scene from somewhere or other, for a short time. Lofty and severe, she looked upon us all with her cold gray eyes, which were like the winter sun, and soon vanished again, leaving us nothing to remember her by.

Once I asked grandmother: "Are you a witch?"

"Well! What idea will you get into your head next?" she laughed. But she added in a thoughtful tone: "How could I be a witch? Witchcraft is a difficult science. Why, I can't read and write even; I don't even know my alphabet. Grandfather—he 's a regular cormorant for learning, but Our Lady never made me a scholar."

Then she presented still another phase of her life to me as she went on:

"I was a little orphan like you, you know. My mother was just a poor peasant woman—and a cripple.

She was little more than a child when a gentleman took advantage of her. In fear of what was to come, she threw herself out of the window one night, and broke her ribs and hurt her shoulder so much that her right hand, which she needed most, was withered . . . and a noted lace-worker, too! Well, of course her employers did not want her after that, and they dismissed her—to get her living as well as she could. How can one earn bread without hands? So she had to beg, to live on the charity of others; but in those times people were richer and kinder . . . the carpenters of Balakhana, as well as the lace-workers, were famous, and all the people were for show.

"Sometimes my mother and I stayed in the town for the autumn and winter, but as soon as the Archangel Gabriel waved his sword and drove away the winter, and clothed the earth with spring, we started on our travels again, going whither our eyes led us. To Mourome we went, and to Urievitz, and by the upper Volga, and by the quiet Oka. It was good to wander about the world in the spring and summer, when all the earth was smiling and the grass was like velvet; and the Holy Mother of God scattered flowers over the fields, and everything seemed to bring joy to one, and speak straight to one's heart. And sometimes, when we were on the hills, my mother, closing her blue eyes, would begin to sing in a voice which, though not power-

ful, was as clear as a bell; and listening to her, everything about us seemed to fall into a breathless sleep. Ah! God knows it was good to be alive in those days!

"But by the time that I was nine years old, my mother began to feel that she would be blamed if she took me about begging with her any longer; in fact, she began to be ashamed of the life we were leading, and so she settled at Balakhana, and went about the streets begging from house to house—taking up a position in the church porch on Sundays and holidays, while I stayed at home and learned to make lace. I was an apt pupil, because I was so anxious to help my mother; but sometimes I did not seem to get on at all, and then I used to cry. But in two years I had learned the business, mind you, small as I was, and the fame of of it went through the town. When people wanted really good lace, they came to us at once:

" 'Now, Akulina, make your bobbins fly!' "

"And I was very happy . . . those were great days for me. But of course it was mother's work, not mine; for though she had only one hand and that one useless, it was she who taught me how to work. And a good teacher is worth more than ten workers.

"Well, I began to be proud. 'Now, my little mother,' I said, 'you must give up begging, for I can earn enough to keep us both.'

" 'Nothing of the sort!' she replied. 'What you earn shall be set aside for your dowry.'

"And not long after this, grandfather came on the scene. A wonderful lad he was—only twenty-two, and already a freewater-man. His mother had had her eye on me for some time. She saw that I was a clever worker, and being only a beggar's daughter, I suppose she thought I should be easy to manage; but—! Well, she was a crafty, malignant woman, but we won't rake up all that. . . . Besides, why should we remember bad people? God sees them; He sees all they do; and the devils love them."

And she laughed heartily, wrinkling her nose comically, while her eyes, shining pensively, seemed to caress me, more eloquent even than her words.

. . . . . .

I remember one quiet evening having tea with grandmother in grandfather's room. He was not well, and was sitting on his bed undressed, with a large towel wrapped round his shoulders, sweating profusely and breathing quickly and heavily. His green eyes were dim, his face puffed and livid; his small, pointed ears also were quite purple, and his hand shook pitifully as he stretched it out to take his cup of tea. His manner was gentle too; he was quite unlike himself.

"Why have n't you given me any sugar?" he asked pettishly, like a spoiled child.

"I have put honey in it; it is better for you," replied grandmother kindly but firmly.

Drawing in his breath and making a sound in his throat like the quacking of a duck, he swallowed the hot tea at a gulp.

"I shall die this time," he said; "see if I don't!"

"Don't you worry! I will take care of you."

"That 's all very well; but if I die now I might as well have never lived. Everything will fall to pieces."

"Now, don't you talk. Lie quiet."

He lay silent for a minute with closed eyes, twisting his thin beard round his fingers, and smacking his discolored lips together; but suddenly he shook himself as if some one had run a pin into him, and began to utter his thoughts aloud:

"Jaaschka and Mischka ought to get married again as soon as possible. New ties would very likely give them a fresh hold on life. What do you think?" Then he began to search his memory for the names of eligible brides in the town.

But grandmother kept silence as she drank cup after cup of tea, and I sat at the window looking at the evening sky over the town as it grew redder and redder and cast a crimson reflection upon the windows of the opposite houses. As a punishment for some misdemeanor, grandfather had forbidden me to go out in

the garden or the yard. Round the birch trees in the garden circled beetles, making a tinkling sound with their wings; a cooper was working in a neighboring yard, and not far away some one was sharpening knives. The voices of children who were hidden by the thick bushes rose up from the garden and the causeway. It all seemed to draw me and hold me, while the melancholy of eventide flowed into my heart.

Suddenly grandfather produced a brand-new book from somewhere, banged it loudly on the palm of his hand, and called me in brisk tones.

"Now, you young rascal, come here! Sit down! Now do you see these letters? This is 'Az.' Say after me 'Az,' 'Buki,' 'Viedi.' What is this one?"

"Buki."

"Right! And what is this?"

"Viedi."

"Wrong! It is 'Az.'

"Look at these—'Glagol,' 'Dobro,' 'Yest.' What is this one?"

"Dobro."

"Right! And this one?"

"Glagol."

"Good! And this one?"

"Az."

"You ought to be lying still, you know, Father," put in grandmother.

"Oh, don't bother! This is just the thing for me; it takes my thoughts off myself. Go on, Lexei!"

He put his hot, moist arm round my neck, and ticked off the letters on my shoulder with his fingers. He smelled strongly of vinegar, to which an odor of baked onion was added, and I felt nearly suffocated; but he flew into a rage and growled and roared in my ear:

" 'Zemlya,' 'Loodi'!"

The words were familiar to me, but the Slav characters did not correspond with them. "Zemlya" (Z) looked like a worm; "Glagol" (G) like round-shouldered Gregory; "Ya" resembled grandmother and me standing together; and grandfather seemed to have something in common with all the letters of the alphabet.

He took me through it over and over again, sometimes asking me the names of the letters in order, sometimes "dodging"; and his hot temper must have been catching, for I also began to perspire, and to shout at the top of my voice—at which he was greatly amused. He clutched his chest as he coughed violently and tossed the book aside, wheezing:

"Do you hear how he bawls, Mother? What are you making that noise for, you little Astrakhan maniac? Eh?"

"It was you that made the noise."

It was a pleasure to me then to look at him and at grandmother, who, with her elbows on the table, and cheek resting on her hand, was watching us and laughing gently as she said:

"You will burst yourselves with laughing if you are not careful."

"I am irritable because I am unwell," grandfather explained in a friendly tone. "But what 's the matter with you, eh?"

"Our poor Natalia was mistaken," he said to grandmother, shaking his damp head, "when she said he had no memory. He has a memory, thank God! It is like a horse's memory. Get on with it, snub-nose!"

At last he playfully pushed me off the bed.

"That will do. You can take the book, and tomorrow you will say the whole alphabet to me without a mistake, and I will give you five kopecks."

When I held out my hand for the book, he drew me to him and said gruffly:

"That mother of yours does not care what becomes of you, my lad."

Grandmother started.

"Oh, Father, why do you say such things?"

"I ought not to have said it—my feelings got the better of me. Oh, what a girl that is for going astray!"

He pushed me from him roughly.

"Run along now! You can go out, but not into the street; don't you dare to do that. Go to the yard or the garden."

The garden had special attractions for me. As soon as I showed myself on the hillock there, the boys in the causeway started to throw stones at me, and I returned the charge with a will.

"Here comes the ninny," they would yell as soon as they saw me, arming themselves hastily. "Let 's skin him!"

As I did not know what they meant by "ninny," the nickname did not offend me; but I liked to feel that I was one alone fighting against the lot of them, especially when a well-aimed stone sent the enemy flying to shelter amongst the bushes. We engaged in these battles without malice, and they generally ended without any one being hurt.

I learned to read and write easily. Grandmother bestowed more and more attention on me, and whippings became rarer and rarer—although in my opinion I deserved them more than ever before, for the older and more vigorous I grew the more often I broke grandfather's rules, and disobeyed his commands; yet he did no more than scold me, or shake his fist at me. I began to think, if you please, that he must have beaten me without cause in the past, and I told him so.

He lightly tilted my chin and raised my face towards him, blinking as he drawled:

"Wha—a—a—t?"

And half-laughing, he added:

"You heretic! How can you possibly know how many whippings you need? Who should know if not I? There! get along with you."

But he had no sooner said this than he caught me by the shoulder and asked:

"Which are you now, I wonder—crafty or simple?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know! Well, I will tell you this much—be crafty; it pays! Simple-mindedness is nothing but foolishness. Sheep are simple-minded, remember that! That will do. Run away!"

. . . . . .

Before long I was able to spell out the Psalms. Our usual time for this was after the evening tea, when I had to read one Psalm.

"B-l-e-s-s, Bless; e-d, ed; Blessed," I read, guiding the pointer across the page. "Blessed is the man—Does that mean Uncle Jaakov?" I asked, to relieve the tedium.

"I 'll box your ears; that will teach you who it is that is blessed," replied grandfather, snorting angrily; but I felt that his anger was only assumed, because he thought it was the right thing to be angry.

And I was not mistaken; in less than a minute it was plain that he had forgotten all about me as he muttered:

"Yes, yes! King David showed himself to be very spiteful—in sport, and in his songs, and in the Absalom affair. Ah! Maker of Songs, Master of Language, and Jester. That is what you were!"

I left off reading to look at his frowning, wondering face. His eyes, blinking slightly, seemed to look through me, and a warm, melancholy brightness shone from them; but I knew that before long his usual harsh expression would return to them. He drummed on the table spasmodically with his thin fingers; his stained nails shone, and his golden eyebrows moved up and down.

"Grandfather!"

"Eh?"

"Tell me a story."

"Get on with your reading, you lazy clown!" he said querulously, rubbing his eyes just as if he had been awakened from sleep. "You like stories, but you don't care for the Psalms!"

I rather suspected that he, too, liked stories better than the Psalter, which he knew almost by heart, for he had made a vow to read it through every night before going to bed, which he did in a sort of chant, just as the deacons recite the breviary in church.

At my earnest entreaty, the old man, who was growing softer every day, gave in to me.

"Very well, then! You will always have the Psalter with you, but God will be calling me to judgment before long."

So, reclining against the upholstered back of the old armchair, throwing back his head and gazing at the ceiling, he quietly and thoughtfully began telling me about old times, and about his father. Once robbers had come to Balakhana, to rob Zaev, the merchant, and grandfather's father rushed to the belfry to sound the alarm; but the robbers came up after him, felled him with their swords, and threw him down from the tower.

"But I was an infant at the time, so of course I do not remember anything about the affair. The first person I remember is a Frenchman; that was when I was twelve years old—exactly twelve. Three batches of prisoners were driven into Balakhana—all small, wizened people; some of them dressed worse than beggars, and others so cold that they could hardly stand by themselves. The peasants would have beaten them to death, but the escort prevented that and drove them away; and there was no more trouble after that. We got used to the Frenchmen, who showed themselves to be skilful and sagacious; merry enough too . . .

sometimes they sang songs. Gentlemen used to come out from Nijni in troikas to examine the prisoners; some of them abused the Frenchmen and shook their fists at them, and even went so far as to strike them, while others spoke kindly to them in their own tongue, gave them money, and showed them great cordiality. One old gentleman covered his face with his hands and wept, and said that that villain Bonaparte had ruined the French. There, you see! He was a Russian, and a gentleman, and he had a good heart—he pitied those foreigners."

He was silent for a moment, keeping his eyes closed, and smoothing his hair with his hands; then he went on, recalling the past with great precision.

"Winter had cast its spell over the streets, the peasants' huts were frostbound, and the Frenchmen used sometimes to run to our mother's house and stand under the windows—she used to make little loaves to sell—and tap on the glass, shouting and jumping about as they asked for hot bread. Mother would not have them in our cottage, but she threw them the loaves from the window; and all hot as they were, they snatched them up and thrust them into their breasts, against their bare skin. How they bore the heat I cannot imagine! Many of them died of cold, for they came from a warm country, and were not ac-

customed to frost. Two of them lived in our wash-house, in the kitchen garden—an officer, with his orderly, Miron.

"The officer was a tall, thin man, with his bones coming through his skin, and he used to go about wrapped in a woman's cloak which reached to his knees. He was very amiable, but a drunkard, and my mother used to brew beer on the quiet and sell it to him. When he had been drinking he used to sing. When he had learned to speak our language he used to air his views—'Your country is not white at all, it is black—and bad!' He spoke very imperfectly, but we could understand him, and what he said was quite true. The upper banks of the Volga are not pleasing, but farther south the earth is warmer, and on the Caspian Sea snow is never even seen. One can believe that, for there is no mention of either snow or winter in the Gospels, or in the Acts, or in the Psalms, as far as I remember . . . and the place where Christ lived . . . Well, as soon as we have finished the Psalms we will read the Gospels together."

He fell into another silence, just as if he had dropped off to sleep. His thoughts were far away, and his eyes, as they glanced sideways out of the window, looked small and sharp.

"Tell me some more," I said, as a gentle reminder of my presence.

He started, and then began again.

"Well—we were talking about French people. They are human beings like ourselves, after all, not worse, or more sinful. Sometimes they used to call out to my mother, 'Madame! Madame!'—that means 'my lady,' 'my mistress'—and she would put flour—five poods of it—into their sacks. Her strength was extraordinary for a woman; she could lift me up by the hair quite easily until I was twenty, and even at that age I was no light weight. Well, this orderly, Miron, loved horses; he used to go into the yard and make signs for them to give him a horse to groom. At first there was trouble about it—there were disputes and enmity—but in the end the peasants used to call him 'Hi, Miron!' and he used to laugh and nod his head, and run to them. He was sandy, almost red-haired, with a large nose and thick lips. He knew all about horses, and treated their maladies with wonderful success; later on he became a veterinary surgeon at Nijni, but he went out of his mind and was killed in a fire. Towards the spring the officer began to show signs of breaking up, and passed quietly away, one day in early spring, while he was sitting at the window of the outhouse—just sitting and thinking, with drooping head.

"That is how his end came. I was very grieved about it. I cried a little, even, on the quiet. He was so gentle. He used to pull my ears, and talk to me

so kindly in his own tongue. I could not understand him, but I liked to hear him—human kindness is not to be bought in any market. He began to teach me his language, but my mother forbade it, and even went so far as to send me to the priest, who prescribed a beating for me, and went himself to make a complaint to the officer. In those days, my lad, we were treated very harshly. You have not experienced anything like it yet. . . . What you have had to put up with is nothing to it, and don't you forget it! . . . Take my own case, for example. . . . I had to go through so much—"

Darkness began to fall. Grandfather seemed to grow curiously large in the twilight, and his eyes gleamed like those of a cat. On most subjects he spoke quietly, carefully, and thoughtfully, but when he talked about himself his words came quickly and his tone was passionate and boastful, and I did not like to hear him; nor did I relish his frequent and peremptory command:

"Remember what I am telling you now! Take care you don't forget this!"

He told me of many things which I had no desire to remember, but which, without any command from him, I involuntarily retained in my memory, to cause me a morbid sickness of heart.

He never told fictitious stories, but always related

events which had really happened; and I also noticed that he hated to be questioned, which prompted me to ask persistently:

"Who are the best—the French or the Russians?"

"How can I tell? I never saw a Frenchman at home," he growled angrily. "A Pole cat is all right in its own hole," he added.

"But are the Russians good?"

"In many respects they are, but they were better when the landlords ruled. We are all at sixes and sevens now; people can't even get a living. The gentlefolk, of course, are to blame, because they have more intelligence to back them up; but *that* can't be said of all of them, but only of a few good ones who have already been proved. As for the others—most of them are as foolish as mice; they will take anything you like to give them. We have plenty of nut shells amongst us, but the kernels are missing; only nut shells, the kernels have been devoured. There 's a lesson for you, man! We ought to have learned it, our wits ought to have been sharpened by now; but we are not keen enough yet."

"Are Russians stronger than other people?"

"We have some very strong people amongst us; but it is not strength which is so important, but dexterity. As far as sheer strength goes, the horse is our superior."

"But why did the French make war on us?"

"Well, war is the Emperor's affair. We can't expect to understand about it."

But to my question: "What sort of a man was Bonaparte?" grandfather replied in a tone of retrospection:

"He was a wicked man. He wanted to make war on the whole world, and after that he wanted to make us all equal—without rulers, or masters; every one to be equal, without distinction of class, under the same rules, professing the same religion, so that the only difference between one person and another would be their names. It was all nonsense, of course. Lobsters are the only creatures which cannot be distinguished one from the other . . . but fish are divided into classes. The sturgeon will not associate with the sheat-fish, and the sterlet refuses to make a friend of the herring. There have been Bonapartes amongst us; there was Razin (Stepan Timotheev), and Pygatch (Emilian Ivanov)—but I will tell you about them another time."

Sometimes he would remain silent for a long time, gazing at me with rolling eyes, as if he had never seen me before, which was not at all pleasant. But he never spoke to me of my father or my mother. Now and again grandmother would enter noiselessly during these conversations, and taking a seat in the corner, would

remain there for a long time silent and invisible. Then she would ask suddenly in her caressing voice:

"Do you remember, Father, how lovely it was when we went on a pilgrimage to Mouron? What year would that be now?"

After pondering, grandfather would answer carefully:

"I can't say exactly, but it was before the cholera. It was the year we caught those escaped convicts in the woods."

"True, true! We were still frightened of them—"

"That's right!"

I asked what escaped convicts were, and why they were running about the woods; and grandfather rather reluctantly explained.

"They are simply men who have run away from prison—from the work they have been set to do."

"How did you catch them?"

"How did we catch them? Why, like little boys play hide-and-seek—some run away and the others look for them and catch them. When they were caught they were thrashed, their nostrils were slit, and they were branded on the forehead as a sign that they were convicts."

"But why?"

"Ah! that is the question—and one I can't answer.

As to which is in the wrong—the one who runs away or the one who pursues him—that also is a mystery!"

"And do you remember, Father," said grandmother, "after the great fire, how we—?"

Grandfather, who put accuracy before everything else, asked grimly:

"What great fire?"

When they went over the past like this, they forgot all about me. Their voices and their words mingled so softly and so harmoniously, that it sounded sometimes as if they were singing melancholy songs about illnesses and fires, about massacred people and sudden deaths, about clever rogues, and religious maniacs, and harsh landlords.

"What a lot we have lived through! What a lot we have seen!" murmured grandfather softly.

"We have n't had such a bad life, have we?" said grandmother. "Do you remember how well the spring began, after Varia was born?"

"That was in the year '48, during the Hungarian Campaign; and the day after the christening they drove out her godfather, Tikhon—"

"And he disappeared," sighed grandmother.

"Yes; and from that time God's blessings have seemed to flow off our house like water off a duck's back. Take Varvara, for instance—"

"Now, Father, that will do!"

"What do you mean—'That will do'?" he asked, scowling at her angrily. "Our children have turned out badly, whichever way you look at them. What has become of the vigor of our youth? We thought we were storing it up for ourselves in our children, as one might pack something away carefully in a basket; when, lo and behold, God changes it in our hands into a riddle without an answer!"

He ran about the room, uttering cries as if he had burned himself, and groaning as if he were ill; then turning on grandmother he began to abuse his children, shaking his small, withered fist at her threateningly as he cried:

"And it is all your fault for giving in to them, and for taking their part, you old hag!"

His grief and excitement culminated in a tearful howl as he threw himself on the floor before the icon, and beating his withered, hollow breast with all his force, cried:

"Lord, have I sinned more than others? Why then—?"

And he trembled from head to foot, and his eyes, wet with tears, glittered with resentment and animosity.

Grandmother, without speaking, crossed herself as she sat in her dark corner, and then, approaching him cautiously, said:

"Now, why are you fretting like this? God knows what He is doing. You say that other people's children are better than ours, but I assure you, Father, that you will find the same thing everywhere—quarrels, and bickerings, and disturbances. All parents wash away their sins with their tears; you are not the only one."

Sometimes these words would pacify him, and he would begin to get ready for bed; then grandmother and I would steal away to our attic.

But once when she approached him with soothing speech, he turned on her swiftly, and with all his force dealt her a blow in the face with his fist.

Grandmother reeled, and almost lost her balance, but she managed to steady herself, and putting her hand to her lips, said quietly: "Fool!" And she spit blood at his feet; but he only gave two prolonged howls and raised both hands to her.

"Go away, or I will kill you!"

"Fool!" she repeated as she was leaving the room.

Grandfather rushed at her, but, with haste, she stepped over the threshold and banged the door in his face.

"Old hag!" hissed grandfather, whose face had become livid, as he clung to the door-post, clawing it viciously.

I was sitting on the couch, more dead than alive,

hardly able to believe my eyes. This was the first time he had struck grandmother in my presence, and I was overwhelmed with disgust at this new aspect of his character—at this revelation of a trait which I found unforgivable, and I felt as if I were being suffocated. He stayed where he was, hanging on to the door-post, his face becoming gray and shriveled up as if it were covered with ashes.

Suddenly he moved to the middle of the room, knelt down, and bent forward, resting his hands on the floor; but he straightened himself almost directly, and beat his breast.

"And now, O Lord—!"

I slipped off the warm tiles of the stove-couch, and crept out of the room, as carefully as if I were treading on ice. I found grandmother upstairs, walking up and down the room, and rinsing her mouth at intervals.

"Are you hurt?"

She went into the corner, spit out some water into the hand-basin, and replied coolly:

"Nothing to make a fuss about. My teeth are all right; it is only my lips that are bruised."

"Why did he do it?"

Glancing out of the window she said:

"He gets into a temper. It is hard for him in his old age. Everything seems to turn out badly. Now

you go to bed, say your prayers, and don't think any more about this."

I began to ask some more questions; but with a severity quite unusual in her, she cried:

"What did I say to you? Go to bed at once! I never heard of such disobedience!"

She sat at the window, sucking her lip and spitting frequently into her handkerchief, and I undressed, looking at her. I could see the stars shining above her black head through the blue, square window. In the street all was quiet, and the room was in darkness. When I was in bed she came over to me and softly stroking my head, she said:

"Sleep well! I shall go down to him. Don't be anxious about me, sweetheart. It was my own fault, you know. Now go to sleep!"

She kissed me and went away; but an overwhelming sadness swept over me. I jumped out of the wide, soft, warm bed, and going to the window, gazed down upon the empty street, petrified by grief.

CHAPTER VII

I WAS not long in grasping the fact that there was one God for grandfather and another for grandmother. The frequency with which this difference was brought to my notice made it impossible to ignore it.

Sometimes grandmother woke up in the morning and sat a long while on the bed combing her wonderful hair. Holding her head firmly, she would draw the comb with its jagged teeth through every thread of that black, silky mane, whispering the while, not to wake me:

"Bother you! The devil take you for sticking together like this!"

When she had thus taken all the tangles out, she quickly wove it into a thick plait, washed in a hurry, with many angry tossings of her head, and without washing away the signs of irritation from her large face, which was creased by sleep, she placed herself before the icon and began her real morning ablutions, by which her whole being was instantly refreshed.

She straightened her crooked back, and raising her

head, gazed upon the round face of Our Lady of Kazan, and after crossing herself reverently, said in a loud, fierce whisper:

"Most Glorious Virgin! Take me under thy protection this day, dear Mother."

Having made a deep obeisance, she straightened her back with difficulty, and then went on whispering ardently, and with deep feeling:

"Source of our Joy! Stainless Beauty! Apple tree in bloom!"

Every morning she seemed to find fresh words of praise; and for that reason I used to listen to her prayers with strained attention.

"Dear Heart, so pure, so heavenly! My Defense and my Refuge! Golden Sun! Mother of God! Guard me from temptation; grant that I may do no one harm, and may not be offended by what others do to me thoughtlessly."

With her dark eyes smiling, and a general air of rejuvenation about her, she crossed herself again, with that slow and ponderous movement of her hand.

"Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner, for Thy Mother's sake!"

Her prayers were always non-liturgical, full of sincere praise, and very simple.

She did not pray long in the mornings because she had to get the samovar ready, for grandfather kept no

servants, and if the tea was not made to the moment, he used to give her a long and furious scolding.

Sometimes he was up before her, and would come up to the attic. Finding her at prayer, he would stand for some minutes listening to her, contemptuously curling his thin, dark lips, and when he was drinking his tea, he would growl:

"How often have I taught you how to say your prayers, blockhead. But you are always mumbling some nonsense, you heretic! I can't think why God puts up with you."

"He understands," grandmother would reply confidently, "what we don't say to Him. He looks into everything."

"You cursed dullard! U—u—ugh, *you!*" was all he said to this.

Her God was with her all day; she even spoke to the animals about Him. Evidently this God, with willing submission, made Himself subject to all creatures—to men, dogs, bees, and even the grass of the field; and He was impartially kind and accessible to every one on earth.

Once the petted cat belonging to the innkeeper's wife—an artful, pretty, coaxing creature, smoke-colored with golden eyes—caught a starling in the garden. Grandmother took away the nearly exhausted bird and punished the cat, crying:

"Have you no fear of God, you spiteful wretch?"

The wife of the innkeeper and the porter laughed at these words, but she said to them angrily:

"Do you think that animals don't understand about God? All creatures understand about Him better than you do, you heartless things!"

When she harnessed Sharapa, who was growing fat and melancholy, she used to hold a conversation with him.

"Why do you look so miserable, toiler of God? Why? You are getting old, my dear, that's what it is." And the horse would sigh and toss his head.

And yet she did not utter the name of God as frequently as grandfather did. Her God was quite comprehensible to me, and I knew that I must not tell lies in His presence; I should be ashamed to do so. The thought of Him produced such an invincible feeling of shame, that I never lied to grandmother. It would be simply impossible to hide anything from this good God; in fact, I had not even a wish to do so.

One day the innkeeper's wife quarreled with grandfather and abused him, and also grandmother, who had taken no part in the quarrel; nevertheless she abused her bitterly, and even threw a carrot at her.

"You are a fool, my good woman," said grandmother very quietly; but I felt the insult keenly, and resolved to be revenged on the spiteful creature.

For a long time I could not make up my mind as to the best way to punish this sandy-haired, fat woman, with two chins and no eyes to speak of. From my own experience of feuds between people living together, I knew that they avenged themselves on one another by cutting off the tails of their enemy's cat, by chasing his dogs, by killing his cocks and hens, by creeping into his cellar in the night and pouring kerosene over the cabbages and cucumbers in the tubs, and letting the kvass run out of the barrels; but nothing of this kind appealed to me. I wanted something less crude, and more terrifying.

At last I had an idea. I lay in wait for the innkeeper's wife, and as soon as she went down to the cellar, I shut the trap door on her, fastened it, danced a jig on it, threw the key on to the roof, and rushed into the kitchen where grandmother was busy cooking. At first she could not understand why I was in such an ecstasy of joy, but when she had grasped the cause, she slapped me—on that part of my anatomy provided for the purpose, dragged me out to the yard, and sent me up to the roof to find the key. I gave it to her with reluctance, astonished at her asking for it, and ran away to a corner of the yard, whence I could see how she set the captive free, and how they laughed together in a friendly way as they crossed the yard.

"I 'll pay you for this!" threatened the innkeeper's wife, shaking her plump fist at me; but there was a good-natured smile on her eyeless face.

Grandmother dragged me back to the kitchen by the collar. "Why did you do that?" she asked.

"Because she threw a carrot at you."

"That means that you did it for me? Very well! This is what I will do for you—I will horsewhip you and put you amongst the mice under the oven. A nice sort of protector you are! 'Look at a bubble and it will burst directly.' If I were to tell grandfather he would skin you. Go up to the attic and learn your lesson."

She would not speak to me for the rest of the day, but before she said her prayers that night she sat on the bed and uttered these memorable words in a very impressive tone:

"Now, Lenka, my darling, you must keep yourself from meddling with the doings of grown-up persons. Grown-up people are given responsibilities and they have to answer for them to God; but it is not so with you yet; you live by a child's conscience. Wait till God takes possession of your heart, and shows you the work you are to do, and the way you are to take. Do you understand? It is no business of yours to decide who is to blame in any matter. God judges, and punishes; that is for Him, not for us."

She was silent for a moment while she took a pinch of snuff; then, half-closing her right eye, she added:

"Why, God Himself does not always know where the fault lies."

"Does n't God know everything?" I asked in astonishment.

"If He knew everything, a lot of things that are done would not be done. It is as if He, the Father, looks and looks from Heaven at the earth, and sees how often we weep, how often we sob, and says: 'My people, my dear people, how sorry I am for you!' "

She was crying herself as she spoke; and drying her wet cheeks, she went into the corner to pray.

From that time her God became still closer and still more comprehensible to me.

Grandfather, in teaching me, also said that God was a Being—Omnipresent, Omniscient, All-seeing, the kind Helper of people in all their affairs; but he did not pray like grandmother. In the morning, before going to stand before the icon, he took a long time washing himself; then, when he was fully dressed, he carefully combed his sandy hair, brushed his beard, and looking at himself in the mirror, saw that his shirt sat well, and tucked his black cravat into his waistcoat —after which he advanced cautiously, almost stealthily, to the icon. He always stood on one particular board of the parquet floor, and with an expression in

his eyes which made them look like the eyes of a horse, he stood in silence for a minute, with bowed head, and arms held straight down by his sides in soldier fashion; then, upright, and slender as a nail, he began impressively:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

After these words it always seemed to me that the room became extraordinarily quiet; the very flies seemed to buzz cautiously.

There he stood, with his head thrown back, his eyebrows raised and bristling, his golden beard sticking out horizontally, and recited the prayers, in a firm tone, as if he were repeating a lesson, and with a voice which was very distinct and very imperious.

"It will be useless when the Judge comes, and every action is laid bare—"

Striking himself lightly on the breast, he prayed fervently:

"To Thee alone can sinners come. Oh, turn Thy face away from my misdeeds."

He recited the "I believe," using the prescribed words only; and all the while his right leg quivered, as if it were noiselessly keeping time with his prayers, and his whole form, straining towards the icon, seemed to become taller, leaner, and drier—so clean he was, so neat, and so persistent in his demands.

"Heavenly Physician, heal my soul of its long-lived passions. To thee, Holy Virgin, I cry from my heart; to thee I offer myself with fervor."

And with his green eyes full of tears he wailed loudly:

"Impute to me, my God, faith instead of works, and be not mindful of deeds which can by no means justify me!"

Here he crossed himself frequently at intervals, tossing his head as if he were about to butt at something, and his voice became squeaky and cracked. Later, when I happened to enter a synagogue, I realized that grandfather prayed like a Jew.

By this time the samovar would have been snorting on the table for some minutes, and a hot smell of rye-cakes would be floating through the room. Grandmother, frowning, strolled about, with her eyes on the floor; the sun looked cheerfully in at the window from the garden, the dew glistened like pearls on the trees, the morning air was deliciously perfumed by the smell of dill, and currant-bushes, and ripening apples, but grandfather went on with his prayers—quavering and squeaking.

"Extinguish in me the flame of passion, for I am in misery and accursed."

I knew all the morning prayers by heart, and even in my dreams I could say what was to come next, and

I followed with intense interest to hear if he made a mistake or missed out a word—which very seldom happened; but when it did, it aroused a feeling of malicious glee in me.

When he had finished his prayers, grandfather used to say "Good morning!" to grandmother and me, and we returned his greeting and sat down to table. Then I used to say to him:

"You left out a word this morning."

"Not really?" grandfather would say with an uneasy air of incredulity.

"Yes. You should have said, 'This, my Faith, reigns supreme,' but you did not say 'reigns.' "

"There now!" he would exclaim, much perturbed, and blinking guiltily.

Afterwards he would take a cruel revenge on me for pointing out his mistake to him; but for the moment, seeing how disturbed he was, I was able to enjoy my triumph.

One day grandmother said to him jokingly:

"God must get tired of listening to your prayers, Father. You do nothing but insist on the same things over and over again."

"What 's that?" he drawled in an ominous voice. "What are you nagging about now?"

"I say that you do not offer God so much as one little word from your own heart, so far as I can hear."

He turned livid, and quivering with rage, jumped up on his chair and threw a dish at her head, yelping with a sound like that made by a saw on a piece of wood:

"Take that, you old hag!"

When he spoke of the omnipotence of God, he always emphasized its cruelty above every other attribute. "Man sinned, and the Flood was sent; sinned again, and his towns were destroyed by fire; then God punished people by famine and plague, and even now He is always holding a sword over the earth—a scourge for sinners. All who have wilfully broken the commandments of God will be punished by sorrow and ruin." And he emphasized this by rapping his fingers on the table.

It was hard for me to believe in the cruelty of God, and I suspected grandfather of having made it all up on purpose to inspire me with fear not of God but of himself; so I asked him frankly:

"Are you saying all this to make me obey you?"

And he replied with equal frankness:

"Well, perhaps I am. Do you mean to disobey me again?"

"And how about what grandmother says?"

"Don't you believe the old fool!" he admonished me sternly. "From her youth she has always been stupid, illiterate, and unreasonable. I shall tell her

she must not dare to talk to you again on such an important matter. Tell me, now—how many companies of angels are there?"

I gave the required answer, and then I asked:

"Are they limited companies?"

"Oh, you scatterbrain!" he laughed, covering his eyes and biting his lips. "What have companies to do with God . . . they belong to life on earth . . . they are founded to set the laws at naught."

"What are laws?"

"Laws! Well, they are really derived from custom," the old man explained, with pleased alacrity; and his intelligent, piercing eyes sparkled. "People living together agree amongst themselves—'Such and such is our best course of action; we will make a custom of it—a rule'; finally it becomes a law. For example, before they begin a game, children will settle amongst themselves how it is to be played, and what rules are to be observed. Laws are made in the same way."

"And what have companies to do with laws?"

"Why, they are like an impudent fellow; they come along and make the laws of no account."

"But why?"

"Ah! that you would not understand," he replied, knitting his brows heavily; but afterwards, as if in explanation, he said:

"All the actions of men help to work out God's plans.

Men desire one thing, but He wills something quite different. Human institutions are never lasting. The Lord blows on them, and they fall into dust and ashes."

I had reason for being interested in "companies," so I went on inquisitively:

"But what does Uncle Jaakov mean when he sings:

"The Angels bright
For God will fight,
But Satan's slaves
Are companies"?

Grandfather raised his hand to his beard, thus hiding his mouth, and closed his eyes. His cheeks quivered, and I guessed that he was laughing inwardly.

"Jaakov ought to have his feet tied together and be thrown into the water," he said. "There was no necessity for him to sing or for you to listen to that song. It is nothing but a silly joke which is current in Kalonga—a piece of schismatical, heretical nonsense." And looking, as it were, through and beyond me, he murmured thoughtfully: "U—u—ugh, *you!*"

But though he had set God over mankind, as a Being to be very greatly feared, none the less did he, like grandmother, invoke Him in all his doings.

The only saints grandmother knew were Nikolai, Yowry, Frola, and Lavra, who were full of kindness and sympathy with human-nature, and went about in the villages and towns sharing the life of the people,

and regulating all their concerns; but grandfather's saints were nearly all males, who cast down idols, or defied the Roman emperors, and were tortured, burned or flayed alive in consequence.

Sometimes grandfather would say musingly:

"If only God would help me to sell that little house, even at a small profit, I would make a public thanksgiving to St. Nicholas."

But grandmother would say to me, laughingly:

"That 's just like the old fool! Does he think St. Nicholas will trouble himself about selling a house? Has n't our little Father Nicholas something better to do?"

I kept by me for many years a church calendar which had belonged to grandfather, containing several inscriptions in his handwriting. Amongst others, opposite the day of Joachim and Anne, was written in red ink, and very upright characters:

"My benefactors, who averted a calamity."

I remember that "calamity."

In his anxiety about the maintenance of his very unprofitable children, grandfather set up as a moneylender, and used to receive articles in pledge secretly. Some one laid an information against him, and one night the police came to search the premises. There was a great fuss, but it ended well, and grandfather prayed till sunrise the next morning, and before break-

fast, and in my presence, wrote those words in the calendar.

Before supper he used to read with me the Psalms, the breviary, or the heavy book of Ephraim Sirine; but as soon as he had supped he began to pray again, and his melancholy words of contrition resounded in the stillness of evening:

"What can I offer to Thee, or how can I atone to Thee, O generous God, O King of Kings! . . . Preserve us from all evil imaginations. . . . O Lord, protect me from certain persons! . . . My tears fall like rain, and the memory of my sins . . ."

But very often grandmother said:

"Oie, I am dog-tired! I shall go to bed without saying my prayers."

Grandfather used to take me to church—to vespers on Saturday, and to High Mass on Sundays and festivals—but even in church I made a distinction as to which God was being addressed; whatever the priest or the deacon recited—that was to grandfather's God; but the choir always sang to grandmother's God. Of course I can only crudely express this childish distinction which I made between these two Gods, but I remember how it seemed to tear my heart with terrific violence, and how grandfather's God aroused in my mind a feeling of terror and unpleasantness. A Being Who loved no one, He followed all of us about with

His severe eyes, seeking and finding all that was ugly, evil, and sinful in us. Evidently He put no trust in man, He was always insisting on penance, and He loved to chastise.

In those days my thoughts and feelings about God were the chief nourishment of my soul and were the most beautiful ones of my existence. All other impressions which I received did nothing but disgust me by their cruelty and squalor, and awaken in me a sense of repugnance and ferocity. God was the best and brightest of all the beings who lived about me—grandmother's God, that Dear Friend of all creation; and naturally I could not help being disturbed by the question—"How is it that grandfather cannot see the Good God?"

I was not allowed to run about the streets because it made me too excited. I became, as it were, intoxicated by the impressions which I received, and there was almost always a violent scene afterwards.

I had no comrades. The neighbors' children treated me as an enemy. I objected to their calling me "the Kashmirin boy," and seeing that they did it all the more, calling out to each other as soon as they saw me: "Look, here comes that brat, Kashmirin's grandson. Go for him!" then the fight would begin. I was strong for my age and active with my fists, and my enemies, knowing this, always fell upon me in a crowd; and

as a rule the street vanquished me, and I returned home with a cut across my nose, gashed lips, and bruises all over my face—all in rags and smothered in dust.

"What now?" grandmother exclaimed as she met me, with a mixture of alarm and pity; "so you 've been fighting again, you young rascal? What do you mean by it?"

She washed my face, and applied to my bruises copper coins or fomentations of lead, saying as she did so:

"Now, what do you mean by all this fighting? You are as quiet as anything at home, but out of doors you are like I don't know what. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I shall tell grandfather not to let you go out."

Grandfather used to see my bruises, but he never scolded me; he only quackled, and roared:

"More decorations! While you are in my house, young warrior, don't you dare to run about the streets; do you hear me?"

I was never attracted by the street if it was quiet, but as soon as I heard the merry buzz of the children, I ran out of the yard, forgetting all about grandfather's prohibition. Bruises and taunts did not hurt me, but the brutality of the street sports—a brutality only too well known to me, wearying and oppressive, reducing one to a state of frenzy—disturbed me tremendously. I could not contain myself when the

children baited dogs and cocks, tortured cats, drove away the goats of the Jews, jeered at drunken vagabonds, and at happy "Igosha with death in his pocket."

This was a tall, withered-looking, smoke-dried individual clad in a heavy sheepskin, with coarse hair on his fleshless, rusty face. He went about the streets, stooping, wavering strangely, and never speaking—gazing fixedly all the time at the ground. His iron-hued face, with its small, sad eyes, inspired me with an uneasy respect for him. Here was a man, I thought, preoccupied with a weighty matter; he was looking for something, and it was wrong to hinder him.

The little boys used to run after him, slinging stones at his broad back; and after going on for some time as if he did not notice them, and as if he were not even conscious of the pain of the blows, he would stand still, throw up his head, push back his ragged cap with a spasmodic movement of his hands, and look about him as if he had but just awoke.

"Igosha with death in his pocket! Igosha, where are you going? Look out, Death in your pocket!" cried the boys.

He would thrust his hand in his pocket, then stooping quickly would pick up a stone or a lump of dry mud from the ground, and flourish his long arms as he muttered abuse, which was confined always to the same few filthy words. The boys' vocabulary was im-

measurably richer than his in this respect. Sometimes he hobbled after them, but his long sheepskin hindered him in running, and he would fall on his knees, resting his black hands on the ground, and looking just like the withered branch of a tree; while the children aimed stones at his sides and back, and the biggest of them ventured to run quite close to him and, jumping about him, scattered handfuls of dust over his head.

But the most painful spectacle which I beheld in the streets was that of our late foreman, Gregory Ivanovitch, who had become quite blind, and now went about begging; looking so tall and handsome, and never speaking. A little gray-haired old woman held him by the arm, and halting under the windows, to which she never raised her eyes, she wailed in a squeaky voice:

"For Christ's sake, pity the poor blind!"

But Gregory Ivanovitch said never a word. His dark glasses looked straight into the walls of the houses, in at the windows, or into the faces of the passers-by; his broad beard gently brushed his stained hands; his lips were closely pressed together. I often saw him, but I never heard a sound proceed from that sealed mouth; and the thought of that silent old man weighed upon me torturingly. I could not go to him—I never went near him; on the contrary, as soon as I caught sight of him being led along, I used to run into the house and say to grandmother:

"Gregory is out there."

"Is he?" she would exclaim in an uneasy, pitying tone. "Well, run back and give him this."

But I would refuse curtly and angrily, and she would go to the gate herself and stand talking to him for a long time. He used to laugh, and pull his beard, but he said little, and that little in monosyllables. Sometimes grandmother brought him into the kitchen and gave him tea and something to eat, and every time she did so he inquired where I was. Grandmother called me, but I ran away and hid myself in the yard. I could not go to him. I was conscious of a feeling of intolerable shame in his presence, and I knew that grandmother was ashamed too. Only once we discussed Gregory between ourselves, and this was one day when, having led him to the gate, she came back through the yard, crying and hanging her head. I went to her and took her hand.

"Why do you run away from him?" she asked softly. "He is a good man, and very fond of you, you know."

"Why does n't grandfather keep him?" I asked.

"Grandfather?" she halted, and then uttered in a very low voice those prophetic words: "Remember what I say to you now—God will punish us grievously for this. He will punish us—"

And she was not wrong, for ten years later, when she had been laid to rest, grandfather was wandering

through the streets of the town, himself a beggar, and out of his mind—pitifully whining under the windows:

"Kind cooks, give me a little piece of pie—just a little piece of pie. U—gh, *you!*"

Besides Igosha and Gregory Ivanovitch, I was greatly concerned about the Voronka—a woman of bad reputation, who was chased away from the streets. She used to appear on holidays—an enormous, dishevelled, tipsy creature, walking with a peculiar gait, as if without moving her feet or touching the earth—drifting along like a cloud, and bawling her ribald songs. People in the street hid themselves as soon as they saw her, running into gateways, or corners, or shops; she simply swept the street clean. Her face was almost blue, and blown out like a bladder; her large gray eyes were hideously and strangely wide open, and sometimes she groaned and cried:

"My little children, where are you?"

I asked grandmother who she was.

"There is no need for you to know," she answered; nevertheless she told me briefly:

"This woman had a husband—a civil-servant named Voronov, who wished to rise to a better position; so he sold his wife to his Chief, who took her away somewhere, and she did not come home for two years. When she returned, both her children—a boy and a girl—were dead, and her husband was in prison for

gambling with Government money. She took to drink, in her grief, and now goes about creating disturbances. No holiday passes without her being taken up by the police."

Yes, home was certainly better than the street. The best time was after dinner, when grandfather went to Uncle Jaakov's workshop, and grandmother sat by the window and told me interesting fairy-tales, and other stories, and spoke to me about my father.

The starling, which she had rescued from the cat, had had his broken wings clipped, and grandmother had skilfully made a wooden leg to replace the one which had been devoured. Then she taught him to talk. Sometimes she would stand for a whole hour in front of the cage, which hung from the window-frame, and, looking like a huge, good-natured animal, would repeat in her hoarse voice to the bird, whose plumage was as black as coal:

"Now, my pretty starling, ask for something to eat."

The starling would fix his small, lively, humorous eye upon her, and tap his wooden leg on the thin bottom of the cage; then he would stretch out his neck and whistle like a goldfinch, or imitate the mocking note of the cuckoo. He would try to mew like a cat, and howl like a dog; but the gift of human speech was denied to him.

"No nonsense now!" grandmother would say quite

seriously. "Say 'Give the starling something to eat.' "

The little black-feathered monkey having uttered a sound which might have been "babushka" (grandmother), the old woman would smile joyfully and feed him from her hand, as she said:

"I know you, you rogue! You are a make-believe. There is nothing you can't do—you are clever enough for anything."

And she certainly did succeed in teaching the starling; and before long he could ask for what he wanted clearly enough, and, prompted by grandmother, could drawl:

"Go—oo—ood mo—o—orning, my good woman!"

At first his cage used to hang in grandfather's room, but he was soon turned out and put up in the attic, because he learned to mock grandfather. He used to put his yellow, waxen bill through the bars of the cage while grandfather was saying his prayers loudly and clearly, and pipe:

"Thou! Thou! Thee! The—ee! Thou!"

Grandfather chose to take offense at this, and once he broke off his prayers and stamped his feet, crying furiously:

"Take that devil away, or I will kill him!"

Much that was interesting and amusing went on in this house; but at times I was oppressed by an inex-

pressible sadness. My whole being seemed to be consumed by it; and for a long time I lived as in a dark pit, deprived of sight, hearing, feeling—blind and half-dead.

CHAPTER VIII

GRANDFATHER unexpectedly sold the house over the tavern and bought another in Kanatoroi Street—a ramshackle house overgrown with grass, but clean and quiet; and it seemed to rise up out of the fields, being the last of a row of little houses painted in various colors.

The new house was trim and charming; its façade was painted in a warm but not gaudy shade of dark raspberry, against which the sky-blue shutters of the three lower windows and the solitary square of the shutter belonging to the attic window appeared very bright. The left side of the roof was picturesquely hidden by thick green elms and lime trees. Both in the yard and in the garden there were many winding paths, so convenient that they seemed to have been placed there on purpose for hide-and-seek.

The garden was particularly good; though not large, it was wooded and pleasantly intricate. In one corner stood a small washhouse, just like a toy building; and in the other was a fair-sized pit, grown over with high grass, from which protruded the thick chimney-stack which was all that remained of the heating apparatus

of an earlier washhouse. On the left the garden was bounded by the wall of Colonel Ovsyanikov's stables, and on the right by Betlenga House; the end abutted on the farm belonging to the dairy-woman Petrovna—a stout, red, noisy female, who reminded me of a bell. Her little house, built in a hollow, was dark and dilapidated, and well covered with moss; its two windows looked out with a benevolent expression upon the field, the deep ravine, and the forest, which apppeared like a heavy blue cloud in the distance. Soldiers moved or ran about the fields all day long, and their bayonets flashed like white lightning in the slanting rays of the autumn sun.

The house was filled with people who seemed to me very wonderful. On the first floor lived a soldier from Tartary with his little, buxom wife, who shouted from morn till night, and laughed, and played on a richly ornamented guitar, and sang in a high flute-like voice. This was the song she sang most often:

"There 's one you love, but her love you will miss,
Seek on! another you must find.
And you will find her—for reward a kiss—
Seven times as beautiful and kind.
Oh, what a glo—or—i—ous reward!"

The soldier, round as a ball, sat at the window and puffed out his blue face, and roguishly turned his reddish eyes from side to side, as he smoked his everlast-

ing pipe, and occasionally coughed, and giggled with a strange, doglike sound:

"Vookh! Voo—kh!"

In the comfortable room which had been built over the cellar and the stables, lodged two draymen—little, gray-haired Uncle Peter and his dumb nephew Stepa—a smooth, easy-going fellow, whose face reminded me of a copper tray—and a long-limbed, gloomy Tartar, Valei, who was an officer's servant. All these people were to me a complete novelty—magnificent "unknowns." But the one who attracted my attention and held it in a special degree, was the boarder, nicknamed "Good-business." He rented a room at the back of the house, next to the kitchen—a long room with two windows, one looking on the garden, the other on the yard. He was a lean, stooping man with a white face and a black beard, cleft in two, with kind eyes over which he wore spectacles. He was silent and unobtrusive, and when he was called to dinner or tea, his invariable reply was "Good-business!" so grandmother began to call him that both to his face and behind his back. It was: "Lenka! Call 'Good-business' to tea," or " 'Good-business,' you are eating nothing!"

His room was blocked up and encumbered with all sorts of cases and thick books, which looked strange to me, in Russian characters. Here were also bottles containing liquids of different colors, lumps of copper and

iron, and bars of lead; and from morning till night, dressed in a reddish leather jacket, with gray check trousers all smeared with different kinds of paint, and smelling abominable, and looking both untidy and uncomfortable, he melted lead, soldered some kind of brass articles, weighed things in small scales, roared out when he burned his fingers, and then patiently blew on them. Or he would stumblingly approach a plan on the wall, and polishing his glasses, sniff at it, almost touching the paper with his straight, curiously pallid nose; or he would suddenly stand still for a long time in the middle of the room, or at the window, with his eyes closed, and his head raised—as if he were in a state of immobile stupefaction.

I used to climb on the roof of the shed, whence I could look across the yard; and in at the open window I could see the blue light of the spirit-lamp on the table, and his dark figure as he wrote something in a tattered notebook, with his spectacles gleaming with a bluish light, like ice. The wizard-like employment of this man often kept me on the roof for hours together, with my curiosity excited to a tormenting pitch. Sometimes he stood at the window, as if he were framed in it, with his hands behind him, looking straight at the roof; but apparently he did not see me, a fact which gave me great offense. Suddenly he would start back to the

table, and bending double, would begin to rummage about.

I think that if he had been rich and better dressed I should have been afraid of him; but he was poor—a dirty shirt collar could be seen above the collar of his coat, his trousers were soiled and patched, and the slippers on his bare feet were down-trodden—and the poor are neither formidable nor dangerous. I had unconsciously learned this from grandmother's pitiful respect, and grandfather's contempt for them.

Nobody in the house liked "Good-business." They all made fun of him. The soldier's lively wife nicknamed him "Chalk-nose," Uncle Peter used to call him "The Apothecary" or "The Wizard," and grandfather described him as "The Black Magician" or "That Freemason."

"What does he do?" I asked grandmother.

"That is no business of yours. Hold your tongue!"

But one day I plucked up courage to go to his window, and concealing my nervousness with difficulty, I asked him, "What are you doing?"

He started, and looked at me for a long time over the top of his glasses; then stretching out his hand, which was covered with scars caused by burns, he said:

"Climb up!"

His proposal that I should enter by the window in-

stead of the door raised him still higher in my estimation. He sat on a case, and stood me in front of him; then he moved away and came back again quite close to me, and asked in a low voice:

"And where do you come from?"

This was curious, considering that I sat close to him at table in the kitchen four times a day.

"I am the landlord's grandson," I replied.

"Ah—yes," he said, looking at his fingers.

He said no more, so I thought it necessary to explain to him:

"I am not a Kashmirin—my name is Pyeshkov."

"Pyeshkov?" he repeated incredulously. "Good-business!"

Moving me on one side, he rose, and went to the table, saying:

"Sit still now."

I sat for a long, long time watching him as he scraped a filed piece of copper, put it through a press, from under which the filings fell, like golden groats, on to a piece of cardboard. These he gathered up in the palm of his hand and shook them into a bulging vessel, to which he added white dust, like salt, which he took from a small bowl, and some fluid out of a dark bottle. The mixture in the vessel immediately began to hiss and to smoke, and a biting smell rose to my nostrils which caused me to cough violently.

"Ah!" said the wizard in a boastful tone. "That smells nasty, does n't it?"

"Yes!"

"That 's right! That shows that it has turned out well, my boy."

"What is there to boast about?" I said to myself; and aloud I remarked severely:

"If it is nasty it can't have turned out well."

"Really!" he exclaimed, with a wink. "That does not always follow, my boy. However— Do you play knuckle-bones?"

"You mean dibs?"

"That 's it."

"Yes."

"Would you like me to make you a thrower?"

"Very well, let me have the dibs then."

He came over to me again, holding the steaming vessel in his hand; and peeping into it with one eye, he said:

"I 'll make you a thrower, and you promise not to come near me again—is that agreed?"

I was terribly hurt at this.

"I will never come near you again, never!" And I indignantly left him and went out to the garden, where grandfather was bustling about, spreading manure round the roots of the apple trees, for it was autumn and the leaves had fallen long ago.

"Here! you go and clip the raspberry bushes," said grandfather, giving me the scissors.

"What work is it that 'Good-business' does?" I asked.

"Work—why, he is damaging his room, that 's all. The floor is burned, and the hangings soiled and torn. I shall tell him he 'd better shift."

"That 's the best thing he can do," I said, beginning to clip the dried twigs from the raspberry bushes.

But I was too hasty.

On wet evenings, whenever grandfather went out, grandmother used to contrive to give an interesting little party in the kitchen, and invited all the occupants of the house to tea. The draymen, the officer's servant, the robust Petrovna often came, sometimes even the merry little lodger, but always "Good-business" was to be found in his corner by the stove, motionless and mute. Dumb Stepa used to play cards with the Tartar. Valei would bang the cards on the deaf man's broad nose and yell:

"Your deal!"

Uncle Peter brought an enormous chunk of white bread, and some jam in large, tall pots; he cut the bread in slices, which he generously spread with jam, and distributed the delicious raspberry-strewn slices to all, presenting them on the palm of his hand and bowing low.

"Do me the favor of eating this," he would beg courteously; and after any one had accepted a slice, he would look carefully at his dark hand, and if he noticed any drops of jam on it, he would lick them off.

Petrovna brought some cherry liqueur in a bottle, the merry lady provided nuts and sweets, and so the feast would begin, greatly to the content of the dear, fat grandmother.

Very soon after "Good-business" had tried to bribe me not to go and see him any more, grandmother gave one of her evenings.

A light autumn rain was falling; the wind howled, the trees rustled and scraped the walls with their branches; but in the kitchen it was warm and cozy as we all sat close together, conscious of a tranquil feeling of kindness towards one another, while grandmother, unusually generous, told us story after story, each one better than the other. She sat on the ledge of the stove, resting her feet on the lower ledge, bending towards her audience with the light of a little tin lamp thrown upon her. Always when she was in a mood for story-telling she took up this position.

"I must be looking down on you," she would explain. "I can always talk better that way."

I placed myself at her feet on the broad ledge, almost on a level with the head of "Good-business," and grandmother told us the fine story of Ivan the Warrior,

and Miron the Hermit, in a smooth stream of pithy, well-chosen words.

. . . . . .

"Once lived a wicked captain—Gordion,
His soul was black, his conscience was of stone;
He hated truth, victims he did not lack,
Fast kept in chains, or stretched upon the rack,
And, like an owl, in hollow tree concealed,
So lived this man, in evil unrevealed.
But there was none who roused his hate and fear
Like Hermit Miron, to the people dear.
Mild and benign, but fierce to fight for truth,
His death was planned without remorse or ruth.
The captain calls—most trusted of his band—
Ivan the Warrior, by whose practiced hand
The Monk, unarmed and guileless, must be slain.
'Ivan!' he said, 'too long that scheming brain
Of Hermit Miron has defied my power.
This proud Monk merits death, and now the hour
Has struck when he must say farewell to earth.
A curse he has been to it, from his birth.
Go, seize him by his venerable beard,
And to me bring the head which cowards have feared.
My dogs with joy shall greedily devour
The head of him who thirsted after power.'
Ivan, obedient, went upon his way;
But to himself he bitterly did say:
'It is not I who do this wicked deed;
I go because my master I must heed.'
His sharp word he hid lest it should betray
The evil designs in his mind that day.
The Monk he salutes with dissembling voice:
'To see you in health I greatly rejoice!

Your blessing, my Father! And God bless you!'
The Monk laughed abrutly, his words were few:
'Enough, Ivan! Your lies do not deceive.
That God knows all, I hope you do believe.
Against His will, nor good nor ill is done.
I know, you see, why you to me have come.'
In shame before the Monk Ivan stood still;
In fear of this man he had come to kill.
From leathern sheath his sword he proudly drew;
The shining blade he rubbed till it looked new.
'I meant to take you unawares,' he said;
'To kill you prayerless; now I am afraid.
To God you now shall have some time to pray.
I 'll give you time for all you want to say,
For me, for you, for all, born and unborn,
And then I 'll send you where your prayers have gone.'
The Hermit knelt; above him spread an oak
Which bowed its head before him. Then he spoke,
In archness smiling. 'Oh, Ivan, think well!
How long my prayer will take I cannot tell.
Had you not better kill me straight away
Lest waiting tire you, furious at delay?'
Ivan in anger frowned, and said in boast,
'My word is given, and though at my post
You keep me a century, I will wait.
So pray in peace, nor your ardor abate.'
The shadows of even fell on the Monk,
And all through the night in prayer he was sunk;
From dawn till sunset, through another night;
From golden summer days to winter's blight
So ran on, year by year, old Miron's prayer.
And to disturb him Ivan did not dare.
The sapling oak its lofty branches reared
Into the sky, while all around appeared

Its offshoots, into a thick forest grown.
And all the time the holy prayer went on,
And still continues to this very day.
The old man softly to his God doth pray,
And to Our Lady, the mother of all,
To help men and women who faint and fall,
To succor the weak, to the sad give joy.
Ivanushka, Warrior, stands close by,
His bright sword long has been covered with dust,
Corroded his armor by biting rust,
Long fallen to pieces his brave attire.
His body is naked and covered with mire.
The heat does but sear, no warmth does impart;
Such fate as his would freeze the stoutest heart.
Fierce wolves and savage bears from him do flee,
From snowstorm and from frost alike he 's free;
No strength has he to move from that dread spot
Or lift his hands. To speak is not his lot.
Let us be warned by his terrible fate,
Nor of meek obedience let us prate.
If we are ordered to do something wrong,
Our duty is then to stand firm and be strong.
But for us sinners still the Hermit prays,
Still flows his prayer to God, e'en in these days—
A dear, bright river, flowing to the sea."

. . . . . .

Before grandmother had reached the end of her story, I had noticed that "Good-business" was, for some reason, agitated; he was fidgeting restlessly with his hands, taking off his spectacles and putting them on again, or waving them to keep time with the rhythm of the words, nodding his head, putting his fingers into

his eyes, or rubbing them energetically, and passing the palms of his hands over his forehead and cheeks, as if he were perspiring freely. When any one of the others moved, coughed, or scraped his feet on the floor, the boarder hissed: "Ssh!"; and when grandmother ceased speaking, and sat rubbing her perspiring face with the sleeve of her blouse, he jumped up noisily, and putting out his hands as if he felt giddy, he babbled:

"I say! That 's wonderful! It ought to be written down; really, it ought. It is terribly true too. . . . Our . . ."

Every one could see now that he was crying; his eyes were full of tears, which flowed so copiously that his eyes were bathed in them—it was a strange and pitiful sight. He looked so comical as he ran about the kitchen, or rather clumsily hopped about—swinging his glasses before his nose; desirous of putting them on again but unable to slip the wires over his ears—that Uncle Peter laughed, and the others were silent from embarrassment. Grandmother said harshly:

"Write it down by all means, if you like. There 's no harm in that. And I know plenty more of the same kind."

"No, that is the only one I want. It is—so—dreadfully Russian!" cried the boarder excitedly; and standing stock-still in the middle of the kitchen, he began to talk loudly, clearing the air with his right hand,

and holding his glasses in the other. He spoke for some time in a frenzied manner, his voice rising to a squeak, stamping his feet, and often repeating himself:

"If we are ordered to do something wrong our duty is then to be firm and strong. True! True!"

Then suddenly his voice broke, he ceased speaking, looked round on all of us, and quietly left the room, hanging his head with a guilty air.

The other guests laughed, and glanced at each other with expressions of embarrassment. Grandmother moved farther back against the stove, into the shadow, and was heard to sigh heavily.

Rubbing the palm of her hand across her thick red lips, Petrovna observed:

"He seems to be in a temper."

"No," replied Uncle Peter; "that 's only his way."

Grandmother left the stove, and in silence began to heat the samovar; and Uncle Peter added, in a slow voice:

"The Lord makes people like that sometimes—freaks."

"Bachelors always play the fool," Valei threw out gruffly, at which there was a general laugh; but Uncle Peter drawled:

"He was actually in tears. It is a case of the pike nibbling what the roach hardly—"

I began to get tired of all this. I was conscious of a heartache. I was greatly astonished by the behavior of "Good-business," and very sorry for him. I could not get his swimming eyes out of my mind.

That night he did not sleep at home, but he returned the next day, after dinner—quiet, crushed, obviously embarrassed.

"I made a scene last night," he said to grandmother, with the air of a guilty child. "You are not angry?"

"Why should I be angry?"

"Why, because I interrupted . . . and talked . . ."

"You offended no one."

I felt that grandmother was afraid of him. She did not look him in the face, and spoke in a subdued tone, and was quite unlike herself.

He drew near to her and said with amazing simplicity:

"You see, I am so terribly lonely. I have no one belonging to me. I am always silent—silent; and then, all on a sudden, my soul seems to boil over, as if it had been torn open. At such times I could speak to stones and trees—"

Grandmother moved away from him.

"If you were to get married now," she began.

"Eh?" he cried, wrinkling up his face, and ran out, throwing his arms up wildly.

Grandmother looked after him frowning, and took a

pinch of snuff; after which she sternly admonished me:

"Don't you hang round him so much. Do you hear? God knows what sort of a man he is!"

But I was attracted to him afresh. I had seen how his face changed and fell when he said "terribly lonely"; there was something in those words which I well understood, and my heart was touched. I went to find him.

I looked, from the yard, into the window of his room; it was empty, and looked like a lumber-room into which had been hurriedly thrown all sorts of unwanted things—as unwanted and as odd as its occupier. I went into the garden, and there I saw him by the pit. He was bending over, with his hands behind his head, his elbows resting on his knees, and was seated uncomfortably on the end of a half-burnt plank. The greater part of this plank was buried in the earth, but the end of it struck out, glistening like coal, above the top of the pit, which was grown over with nettles.

The very fact of his being in such an uncomfortable place made me look upon this man in a still more favorable light. He did not notice me for some time; he was gazing beyond me with his half-blind, owl-like eyes, when he suddenly asked in a tone of vexation:

"Did you want me for anything?"

"No."

"Why are you here then?"

"I could n't say."

He took off his glasses, polished them with his red and black spotted handkerchief, and said:

"Well, climb up here."

When I was sitting beside him, he put his arm round my shoulders and pressed me to him.

"Sit down. Now let us sit still and be quiet. Will that suit you? This is the same— Are you obstinate?"

"Yes."

"Good-business!"

We were silent a long time. It was a quiet, mild evening, one of those melancholy evenings of late summer, when, in spite of the profusion of flowers, signs of decay are visible, and every hour brings impoverishment; when the earth, having already exhausted its luxuriant summer odors, smells of nothing but a chill dampness; when the air is curiously transparent, and the daws dart aimlessly to and fro against the red sky, arousing a feeling of unhappiness. Silence reigned; and any sound, such as the fluttering of birds or the rustling of fallen leaves, struck one as being unnaturally loud, and caused a shuddering start, which soon died away into that torpid stillness which seemed to encompass the earth and cast a spell over the heart. In such moments as these are born thoughts of a peculiar

purity—ethereal thoughts, thin, transparent as a cobweb, incapable of being expressed in words. They come and go quickly, like falling stars, kindling a flame of sorrow in the soul, soothing and disturbing it at the same time; and the soul is, as it were, on fire, and, being plastic, receives an impression which lasts for all time.

Pressed close to the boarder's warm body, I gazed, with him, through the black branches of the apple tree, at the red sky, following the flight of the flapping rooks, and noticing how the dried poppy-heads shook on their stems, scattering their coarse seeds; and I observed the ragged, dark blue clouds with livid edges, which stretched over the fields, and the crows flying heavily under the clouds to their nests in the burial-ground.

It was all beautiful; and that evening it all seemed especially beautiful, and in harmony with my feelings. Sometimes, with a heavy sigh, my companion said:

"This is quite all right, my boy, is n't it? And you don't feel it damp or cold?"

But when the sky became overcast, and the twilight, laden with damp, spread over everything, he said:

"Well, it can't be helped. We shall have to go in."

He halted at the garden gate and said softly:

"Your grandmother is a splendid woman. Oh, what a treasure!" And he closed his eyes with a smile and recited in a low, very distinct voice:

" 'Let us be warned by his terrible fate,
Nor of meek obedience let us prate.
If we are ordered to do something wrong,
Our duty is then to stand firm and be strong.' "

"Don't forget that, my boy!"

And pushing me before him, he asked:

"Can you write?"

"No."

"You must learn; and when you have learned, write down grandmother's stories. You will find it worth while, my boy."

And so we became friends; and from that day I went to see "Good-business" whenever I felt inclined; and sitting on one of the cases, or on some rags, I used to watch him melt lead and heat copper till it was red-hot, beat layers of iron on a little anvil with an elegant-handled, light hammer, or work with a smooth file and a saw of emery, which was as fine as a thread. He weighed everything on his delicately adjusted copper scales; and when he had poured various liquids into bulging, white vessels, he would watch them till they smoked and filled the room with an acrid odor, and then with a wrinkled-up face he would consult a thick book, biting his red lips, or softly humming in his husky voice:

"O Rose of Sharon—!"

"What are you doing?"

"I am making something, my boy."

"What?"

"Ah—that I can't tell you. You would n't understand."

"Grandfather says he would not be surprised if you were coining false money."

"Your grandfather? M'm! Well, he says that for something to say. Money's all nonsense, my boy."

"How should we buy bread without it?"

"Well, yes; we want it for that, it is true."

"And for meat too."

"Yes, and for meat."

He smiled quietly, with a kindness which astonished me; and pulling my ear, said:

"It is no use arguing with you. You always get the best of it. I 'd better keep quiet."

Sometimes he broke off his work, and sitting beside me he would gaze for a long time out of the window, watching the rain patter down on the roof, and noting how the grass was growing over the yard, and how the apple trees were being stripped of their leaves. "Goodbusiness" was niggardly with his words, but what he said was to the point; more often than not, when he wished to draw my attention to something, he nudged me and winked instead of speaking. The yard had never been particularly attractive to me, but his nudges

and his brief words seemed to throw a different complexion on it, and everything within sight seemed worthy of notice. A kitten ran about, and halting before a shining pool gazed at its own reflection, lifting its soft paw as if it were going to strike it.

"Cats are vain and distrustful," observed "Good-business" quietly.

Then there was the red-gold cock Mamae, who flew on to the garden hedge, balanced himself, shook out his wings, and nearly fell; whereupon he was greatly put out, and muttered angrily, stretching out his neck:

"A consequential general, and not over-clever at that."

Clumsy Valei passed, treading heavily through the mud, like an old horse; his face, with its high cheek-bones, seemed inflated as he gazed, blinking, at the sky, from which the pale autumn beams fell straight on his chest, making the brass buttons on his coat shine brilliantly. The Tartar stood still and touched them with his crooked fingers—"just as if they were medals bestowed on him."

My attachment to "Good-business" grew apace, and became stronger every day, till I found that he was indispensable both on days when I felt myself bitterly aggrieved, and in my hours of happiness. Although he was taciturn himself, he did not forbid me to talk about

anything which came into my head; grandfather, on the other hand, always cut me short by his stern exclamation:

"Don't chatter, you mill of the devil!"

Grandmother, too, was so full of her own ideas that she neither listened to other people's ideas nor admitted them into her mind; but "Good-business" always listened attentively to my chatter, and often said to me smilingly:

"No, my boy, that is not true. That is an idea of your own."

And his brief remarks were always made at the right time, and only when absolutely necessary; he seemed to be able to pierce the outer covering of my heart and head, and see all that went on, and even to see all the useless, untrue words on my lips before I had time to utter them—he saw them and cut them off with two gentle blows:

"Untrue, boy."

Sometimes I tried to draw out his wizard-like abilities. I made up something and told it to him as if it had really happened; but after listening for a time, he would shake his head.

"Now—that 's not true, my boy."

"How do you know?"

"I can feel it, my boy."

When grandmother went to fetch water from Syeniu

Square, she often used to take me with her; and on one occasion we saw five citizens assault a peasant, throwing him on the ground, and dragging him about as dogs might do to another dog. Grandmother slipped her pail off the yoke, which she brandished as she flew to the rescue, calling to me as she went:

"You run away now!"

But I was frightened, and, running after her, I began to hurl pebbles and large stones at the citizens, while she bravely made thrusts at them with the yoke, striking at their shoulders and heads. When other people came on the scene they ran away, and grandmother set to work to bathe the injured man's wounds. His face had been trampled, and the sight of him as he pressed his dirty fingers to his torn nostrils and howled and coughed, while the blood spurted from under his fingers over grandmother's face and breast, filled me with repugnance; she uttered a cry too, and trembled violently.

As soon as I returned home I ran to the boarder and began to tell him all about it. He left off working, and stood in front of me looking at me fixedly and sternly from under his glasses; then he suddenly interrupted me, speaking with unusual impressiveness:

"That 's a fine thing, I must say—very fine!"

I was so taken up by the sight I had witnessed that his words did not surprise me, and I went on with

my story; but he put his arm round me, and then left me and walked about the room uncertainly.

"That will do," he said; "I don't want to hear any more. You have said all that is needful, my boy—all. Do you understand?"

I felt offended, and did not answer; but on thinking the matter over afterwards, I have still a lively recollection of my astonishment at the discovery that he had stopped me at exactly the right time. I had, in truth, told all there was to tell.

"Do not dwell on this incident, child; it is not a good thing to remember," he said.

Sometimes on the spur of the moment he uttered words which I have never forgotten. I remember telling him about my enemy Kliushnikov, a warrior from New Street—a fat boy with a large head, whom I could not conquer in battle, nor he me. "Good-business" listened attentively to my complaint, and then he said:

"That 's all nonsense! That sort of strength does not count. Real strength lies in swift movements. He who is swiftest is strongest. See?"

The next Sunday I used my fists more quickly, and easily conquered Kliushnikov, which made me pay still more heed to what the boarder said.

"You must learn to grasp all kinds of things, do you see? It is very difficult to learn how to grasp."

I did not understand him at all, but I involuntarily

remembered this, with many other similar sayings; but this one especially, because in its simplicity it was provokingly mysterious. Surely it did not require any extraordinary cleverness to be able to grasp stones, a piece of bread, a cup or a hammer!

In the house, however, "Good-business" became less and less liked; even the friendly cat of the merry lady would not jump on his knees as she jumped on the knees of the others, and took no notice when he called her kindly. I beat her for that and pulled her ears, and, almost weeping, told her not to be afraid of the man.

"It is because my clothes smell of acids—that is why he will not come to me," he explained; but I knew that every one else, even grandmother, gave quite a different explanation—uncharitable, untrue, and injurious to him.

"Why are you always hanging about him?" demanded grandmother angrily. "He 'll be teaching you something bad—you 'll see!"

And grandfather hit me ferociously whenever I visited the boarder, who, he was firmly convinced, was a rogue.

Naturally I did not mention to "Good-business" that I was forbidden to make a friend of him, but I did tell him frankly what was said about him in the house:

"Grandmother is afraid of you; she says you are a

black magician. And grandfather too—he says you are one of God's enemies, and that it is dangerous to have you here."

He moved his hand about his head as if he were driving away flies; but a smile spread like a blush over his chalk-white face, and my heart contracted, and a mist seemed to creep over my eyes.

"I see!" he said softly. "It is a pity, is n't it?"

"Yes."

"It 's a pity, my lad—yes."

Finally they gave him notice to quit. One day, when I went to him after breakfast, I found him sitting on the floor packing his belongings in cases, and softly singing to himself about the Rose of Sharon.

"Well, it 's good-by now, my friend; I am going."

"Why?"

He looked at me fixedly as he said:

"Is it possible you don't know? This room is wanted for your mother."

"Who said so?"

"Your grandfather."

"Then he told a lie!"

"Good-business" drew me towards him; and when I sat beside him on the floor, he said softly:

"Don't be angry. I thought that you knew about it and would not tell me; and I thought you were not treating me well."

So that was why he had been sad and vexed in his manner.

"Listen!" he went on, almost in a whisper. "You remember when I told you not to come and see me?"

I nodded.

"You were offended, were n't you?"

"Yes."

"But I had no intention of offending you, child. I knew, you see, that if you became friendly with me, you would get into trouble with your family. And was n't I right? Now, do you understand why I said it?"

He spoke almost like a child of my own age, and I was beside myself with joy at his words. I felt that I had known this all along, and I said:

"I understood that long ago."

"Well, there it is. It has happened as I said, my little dove!"

The pain in my heart was almost unbearable.

"Why do none of them like you?"

He put his arm round me, and pressed me to him and answered, blinking down at me:

"I am of a different breed—do you see? That 's what it is. I am not like them—"

I just held his hands, not knowing what to say; incapable, in fact, of saying anything.

"Don't be angry!" he said again; and then he whispered in my ear: "And don't cry either." But all the

time his own tears were flowing freely from under his smeared glasses.

After that we sat, as usual, in silence, which was broken at rare intervals by a brief word or two; and that evening he went, courteously bidding farewell to every one, and hugging me warmly. I accompanied him to the gate, and watched him drive away in the cart, and being violently jolted as the wheels passed over the hillocks of frozen mud.

Grandmother set to work immediately to clean and scrub the dirty room, and I wandered about from corner to corner on purpose to hinder her.

"Go away!" she cried, when she stumbled over me.

"Why did you send him away then?"

"Don't talk about things you don't understand."

"You are fools—all of you!" I said.

She flicked me with her wet floorcloth, crying:

"Are you mad, you little wretch?"

"I did not mean you, but the others," I said, trying to pacify her; but with no success.

At supper grandfather exclaimed:

"Well, thank God he has gone! I should never have been surprised, from what I saw of him, to find him one day with a knife through his heart. Och! It was time he went."

I broke a spoon out of revenge, and then I relapsed

into my usual state of sullen endurance. Thus ended my friendship with the first one of that endless chain of friends belonging to my own country—the verv best of her people.

CHAPTER IX

I IMAGINE myself, in my childhood, as a hive to which all manner of simple, undistinguished people brought, as the bees bring honey, their knowledge and thoughts about life, generously enriching my soul with what they had to give. The honey was often dirty, and bitter, but it was all the same knowledge—and honey.

After the departure of "Good-business," Uncle Peter became my friend. He was in appearance like grandfather, in that he was wizened, neat, and clean; but he was shorter and altogether smaller than grandfather. He looked like a person hardly grown-up dressed up like an old man for fun. His face was creased like a square of very fine leather, and his comical, lively eyes, with their yellow whites, danced amidst these wrinkles like siskins in a cage. His raven hair, now growing gray, was curly, his beard also fell into ringlets, and he smoked a pipe, the smoke from which—the same color as his hair—curled upward into rings too; his style of speech was florid, and abounded in quaint sayings. He always spoke in a buzzing voice, and sometimes very

kindly, but I always had an idea that he was making fun of everybody.

"When I first went to her, the lady-countess Tatian —her name was Lexievna—said to me, 'You shall be blacksmith'; but after a time she orders me to go and help the gardener. 'All right, I don't mind, only I did n't engage to work as a laborer, and it is not right that I should have to.' Another time she 'd say 'Now, Petrushka, you must go fishing.' It was all one to me whether I went fishing or not, but I preferred to say 'good-by' to the fish, thank you!—and I came to the town as a drayman. And here I am, and have never been anything else. So far I have not done much good for myself by the change. The only thing I possess is the horse, which reminds me of the Countess."

This was an old horse, and was really white, but one day a drunken house painter had begun to paint it in various colors, and had never finished his job. Its legs were dislocated, and altogether it looked as if it were made of rags sewn together; the bony head, with its dim, sadly drooping eyes, was feebly attached to the carcass by swollen veins and old, worn-out skin. Uncle Peter waited upon the creature with much respect, and called it "Tankoe."

"Why do you call that animal by a Christian name?" asked grandfather one day.

"Nothing of the kind, Vassili Vassilev, nothing of

the kind—in all respect I say it. There is no such Christian name as Tanka—but there is 'Tatiana'!"

Uncle Peter was educated and well-read, and he and grandfather used to quarrel as to which of the saints was the most holy; and sit in judgment, each more severely than the other, on the sinners of ancient times. The sinner who was most hardly dealt with was Absalom. Sometimes the dispute took a purely grammatical form, grandfather saying that it ought to be "sogryeshi*khom*, bezzakonnova*khom*, nepravdava*khom*," and Uncle Peter insisting that it was "sogryesh*isha*, bezzakonno*vasha*, nepravdo*vasha*."

"I say it one way, and you say it another!" said grandfather angrily, turning livid. Then he jeered: "*Vasha! Shisha!*"

But Uncle Peter, enveloped in smoke, asked maliciously:

"And what is the use of your 'khoms'? Do you think God takes any notice of them? What God says when He listens to our prayers is: 'Pray how you like, pray what you like.' "

"Go away, Lexei!" shrieked grandfather in a fury, with his green eyes flashing.

Peter was very fond of cleanliness and tidiness. When he went into the yard he used to kick to one side any shavings, or pieces of broken crockery, or bones that were lying about, with the scornful remark:

"These things are no use, and they get in the way."

Although he was usually talkative, good-natured, and merry, there were times when his eyes became bloodshot and grew dim and fixed, like the eyes of a dead person, and he would sit, huddled up in a corner, morose and as dumb as his nephew.

"What is the matter with you, Uncle Peter?"

"Let me alone!" he would say darkly and grimly.

In one of the little houses in our street there lived a gentleman, with wens on his forehead, and the most extraordinary habits; on Sundays he used to sit at the window and shoot from a shot-gun at dogs and cats, hens and crows, or whatever came in his way that did not please him. One day he fired at the side of "Good-business"; the shots did not pierce his leather coat, but some of them fell into his pocket. I shall never forget the interested expression with which the boarder regarded the dark-blue shots. Grandfather tried to persuade him to make a complaint about it, but, throwing the shots into a corner of the kitchen, he replied:

"It is not worth while."

Another time our marksman planted a few shots in grandfather's leg, and he, much enraged, got up a petition to the authorities, and set to work to get the names of other sufferers and witnesses in the street; but the culprit suddenly disappeared.

As for Uncle Peter, every time he heard the sound

of shooting in the street—if he were at home—he used to hastily cover his iron-gray head with his glossy Sunday cap, which had large ear-flaps, and rush to the gate. Here he would hide his hands behind his back under his coat-tails, which he would lift up in imitation of a cock, and sticking out his stomach, would strut solemnly along the pavement quite close to the marksman, and then turn back. He would do this over and over again, and our whole household would be standing at the gate; while the purple face of the warlike gentleman could be seen at his window, with the blonde head of his wife over his shoulder, and people coming out of Betlenga yard—only the gray, dead house of the Ovsyanikovs showed no signs of animation.

Sometimes Uncle Peter made these excursions without any result, the hunter evidently not looking upon him as game worthy of his skill in shooting; but on other occasions the double-barrelled gun was discharged over and over again.

"Boom! Boom!"

With leisurely steps Uncle Peter came back to us and exclaimed, in great delight:

"He sent every shot into the field!"

Once he got some shot into his shoulder and neck; and grandmother gave him a lecture while she was getting them out with a needle:

"Why on earth do you encourage the beast? He will blind you one of these days."

"Impossible, Akulina Ivanna," drawled Peter contemptuously. "He 's no marksman!"

"But why do you encourage him?"

"Do you think I am encouraging him? No! I like teasing the gentleman."

And looking at the extracted shot in his palm, he said:

"He 's no marksman. But up there, at the house of my mistress, the Countess Tatiana Lexievna, there was an Army man—Marmont Ilich. He was taken up most of the time with matrimonial duties—husbands were in the same category as footmen with her—and so he was kept busy about her; but he could shoot, if you like—only with bullets though, grandmother; he would n't shoot with anything else. He put Ignashka the Idiot at forty paces or thereabouts from him, with a bottle tied to his belt and placed so that it hung between his legs; and while Ignashka stood there with his legs apart laughing in his foolish way, Marmont Ilich took his pistol and—bang!—the bottle was smashed to pieces. Only, unfortunately Ignashka swallowed a gadfly, or something, and gave a start, and the bullet went into his knee, right into the knee-cap. The doctor was called and he took the

leg off; it was all over in a minute, and the leg was buried . . ."

"But what about the idiot?"

"Oh, he was all right! What does an idiot want with legs and arms? His idiocy brings him in more than enough to eat and drink. Every one loves idiots; they are harmless enough. You know the saying: 'It is better for underlings to be fools; they can do less harm then.' "

This sort of talk did not astonish grandmother, she had listened to it scores of times, but it made me rather uncomfortable, and I asked Uncle Peter:

"Would that gentleman be able to kill any one?"

"And why not? Of cou—rse he could! . . . He even fought a duel. A Uhlan, who came on a visit to Tatiana Lexievna, had a quarrel with Marmont, and in a minute they had their pistols in their hands, and went out to the park; and there on the path by the pond that Uhlan shot Marmont bang through the liver. Then Marmont was sent to the churchyard, and the Uhlan to the Caucasus . . . and the whole affair was over in a very short time. That is how they did for themselves. And amongst the peasants, and the rest of them, he is not talked of now. People don't regret him much; they never regretted him for himself . . . but all the same they did grieve at one time —for his property."

"Well, then they did n't grieve much," said grandmother.

Uncle Peter agreed with her:

"That 's true! . . . His property. . . yes, that was n't worth much."

He always bore himself kindly towards me, spoke to me good-naturedly, and as if I were a grown person, and looked me straight in the eyes; but all the same there was something about him which I did not like. Having regaled me with my favorite jam, he would spread my slice of bread with what was left, he would bring me malted gingerbread from the town, and always conversed with me in a quiet and serious tone.

"What are you going to do, young gentleman, when you grow up? Are you going into the Army or the Civil Service?"

"Into the Army."

"Good! A soldier's life is not a hard one in these days. A priest's life is n't bad either . . . all he has to do is to chant, and pray to God, and that does not take long. In fact, a priest has an easier job than a soldier . . . but a fisherman's job is easier still; that does not require any education at all, it is simply a question of habit."

He gave an amusing imitation of the fish hovering round the bait, and of the way perch, mugil, and

bream throw themselves about when they get caught on the hook.

"Now, you get angry when grandfather whips you," he would say soothingly, "but you have no cause to be angry at that, young gentleman; whippings are a part of your education, and those that you get are, after all, mere child's play. You should just see how my mistress, Tatiana Lexievna, used to thrash! She could do it all right, she could! And she used to keep a man especially for that—Christopher his name was —and he did his work so well that sometimes neighbors from other manor-houses sent a message to the Countess: 'Please, Tatiana Lexievna, send Christopher to thrash our footman.' And she used to let him go."

In his artless manner, he would give a detailed account of how the Countess, in a white muslin frock with a gauzy, sky-colored handkerchief over her head, would sit on the steps, by one of the pillars, in a red armchair, while Christopher flogged the peasants, male and female, in her presence.

"And this Christopher was from Riazan, and he looked like a gipsy, or a Little Russian, with mustaches sticking out beyond his ears, and his ugly face all blue where he had shaved his beard. And either he was a fool, or he pretended to be one so that he should not be asked useless questions. Sometimes he used

to pour water into a cup to catch flies and cockroaches, which are a kind of beetle, and then he used to boil them over the fire."

I was familiar with many such stories, which I had heard from the lips of grandmother and grandfather. Though they were different, yet they were all curiously alike; each one told of people being tormented, jeered at, or driven away, and I was tired of them, and as I did not wish to hear any more, said to the cab-driver:

"Tell me another kind of story."

All his wrinkles were gathered about his mouth for a space, then they spread themselves to his eyes, as he said obligingly:

"All right, Greedy! Well, we once had a cook—"

"Who had?"

"The Countess Tatian Lexievna."

"Why do you call her Tatian? She was n't a man, was she?"

He laughed shrilly.

"Of course she was n't. She was a lady; but all the same she had whiskers. Dark she was . . . she came of a dark German race . . . people of the negro type they are. Well, as I was saying, this cook—this is a funny story, young gentleman."

And this "funny story" was that the cook had spoiled

a fish pasty, and had been made to eat it all up himself, after which he had been taken ill.

"It is not at all funny!" I said angrily.

"Well, what is your idea of a funny story? Come on! Let 's have it."

"I don't know—"

"Then hold your tongue!" And he spun out another dreary yarn.

Occasionally, on Sundays and holidays, we received a visit from my cousins—the lazy and melancholy Sascha Michhailov, and the trim, omniscient Sascha Jaakov. Once, when the three of us had made an excursion up to the roof, we saw a gentleman in a green fur-trimmed coat sitting in the Betlenga yard upon a heap of wood against the wall, and playing with some puppies; his little, yellow, bald head was uncovered. One of the brothers suggested the theft of a puppy, and they quickly evolved an ingenious plan by which the brothers were to go down to the street and wait at the entrance to Betlenga yard, while I did something to startle the gentleman; and when he ran away in alarm they were to rush into the yard and seize a puppy.

"But how am I to startle him?"

"Spit on his bald head," suggested one of my cousins.

But was it not a grievous sin to spit on a person's

head? However, I had heard over and over again, and had seen with my own eyes, that they had done many worse things than that, so I faithfully performed my part of the contract, with my usual luck.

There was a terrible uproar and scene; a whole army of men and women, headed by a young, good-looking officer, rushed out of Betlenga House into the yard, and as my two cousins were, at the very moment when the outrage was committed, quietly walking along the street, and knew nothing of my wild prank, I was the only one to receive a thrashing from grandfather, by which the inhabitants of Betlenga House were completely satisfied.

And as I lay, all bruised, in the kitchen, there came to me Uncle Peter, dressed in his best, and looking very happy.

"That was a jolly good idea of yours, young gentleman," he whispered. "That 's just what the silly old goat deserved—to be spit upon! Next time—throw a stone on his rotten head!"

Before me rose the round, hairless, childlike face of the gentleman, and I remembered how he had squeaked feebly and plaintively, just like the puppies, as he had wiped his yellow pate with his small hands, and I felt overwhelmed with shame, and full of hatred for my cousins; but I forgot all this in a moment when I gazed on the drayman's wrinkled face, which quivered

with a half-fearful, half-disgusted expression, like grandfather's face when he was beating me.

"Go away!" I shrieked, and struck at him with my hands and feet.

He tittered, and winking at me over his shoulder, went away.

From that time I ceased to have any desire for intercourse with him; in fact, I avoided him. And yet I began to watch his movements suspiciously, with a confused idea that I should discover something about him. Soon after the incident connected with the gentleman of Betlenga House, something else occurred. For a long time I had been very curious about Ovsyanikov House, and I imagined that its gray exterior hid a mysterious romance.

Betlenga House was always full of bustle and gaiety; many beautiful ladies lived there, who were visited by officers and students, and from it sounds of laughter and singing, and the playing of musical instruments, continually proceeded. The very face of the house looked cheerful, with its brightly polished window-panes.

Grandfather did not approve of it.

"They are heretics . . . and godless people, all of them!" he said about its inhabitants, and he applied to the women an offensive term, which Uncle Peter

explained to me in words equally offensive and malevolent.

But the stern, silent Ovsyanikov House inspired grandfather with respect.

This one-storied but tall house stood in a well-kept yard overgrown with turf, empty save for a well with a roof supported by two pillars, which stood in the middle. The house seemed to draw back from the street as if it wished to hide from it. Two of its windows, which had chiselled arches, were at some distance from the ground, and upon their dust-smeared panes the sun fell with a rainbow effect. And on the other side of the gateway stood a storehouse, with a façade exactly like that of the house, even to the three windows, but they were not real ones; the outlines were built into the gray wall, and the frames and sashes painted on with white paint. These blind windows had a sinister appearance, and the whole storehouse added to the impression which the house gave, of having a desire to hide and escape notice. There was a suggestion of mute indignation, or of secret pride, about the whole house, with its empty stables, and its coachhouse, with wide doors, also empty.

Sometimes a tall old man, with shaven chin and white mustache, the hair of which stuck out stiffly

like so many needles, was to be seen hobbling about the yard. At other times another old man, with whiskers and a crooked nose, led out of the stables a gray mare with a long neck—a narrow-chested creature with thin legs, which bowed and scraped like an obsequious nun as soon as she came out into the yard. The lame man slapped her with his palms, whistling, and drawing in his breath noisily; and then the mare was again hidden in the dark stable. I used to think that the old man wanted to run away from the house, but could not because he was bewitched.

Almost every day from noon till the evening three boys used to play in the yard all dressed alike in gray coats and trousers, with caps exactly alike, and all of them with round faces and gray eyes; so much alike that I could only tell one from the other by their height.

I used to watch them through a chink in the fence; they could not see me, but I wanted them to know I was there. I liked the way they played together, so gaily and amicably, games which were unfamiliar to me; I liked their dress, and their consideration for each other, which was especially noticeable in the conduct of the elder ones to their little brother, a funny little fellow, full of life. If he fell down, they laughed—it being the custom to laugh when any one has a fall—but there was no malice in their laughter,

and they ran to help him up directly; and if he made his hands or knees dirty, they wiped his fingers and trousers with leaves or their handkerchiefs, and the middle boy said good-naturedly:

"There, clumsy!"

They never quarreled amongst themselves, never cheated, and all three were agile, strong and indefatigable.

One day I climbed up a tree and whistled to them; they stood stock-still for a moment, then they calmly drew close together, and after looking up at me, deliberated quietly amongst themselves. Thinking that they were going to throw stones at me, I slipped to the ground, filled my pockets and the front of my blouse with stones, and climbed up the tree again; but they were playing in another corner of the yard, far away from me, and apparently had forgotten all about me. I was very sorry for this; first, because I did not wish to be the one to begin the war, and secondly, because just at that moment some one called to them out of the window:

"You must come in now, children."

They went submissively, but without haste, in single file, like geese.

I often sat on the tree over the fence hoping that they would ask me to play with them; but they never did. But in spirit I was always playing with them,

and I was so fascinated by the games sometimes that I shouted and laughed aloud; whereupon all three would look at me and talk quietly amongst themselves, whilst I, overcome with confusion, would let myself drop to the ground.

One day they were playing hide-and-seek, and when it came to the turn of the middle brother to hide, he stood in the corner by the storehouse and shut his eyes honestly, without attempting to peep, while his brothers ran to hide themselves. The elder one nimbly and swiftly climbed into a broad sledge which was kept in a shed against the storehouse, but the youngest one ran in a comical fashion round and round the well, flustered by not knowing where to hide.

"One—" shouted the elder one. "Two—"

The little boy jumped on the edge of the well, seized the rope, and stepped into the bucket, which, striking once against the edge with a dull sound, disappeared. I was stupefied, as I saw how quickly and noiselessly the well-oiled wheel turned, but I realized in a moment the possibilities of the situation, and I jumped down into the yard crying:

"He has fallen into the well!"

The middle boy and I arrived at the edge of the well at the same time; he clutched at the rope and, feeling himself drawn upwards, loosed his hands. I

was just in time to catch the rope, and the elder brother, having come up, helped me to draw up the bucket, saying:

"Gently, please!"

We quickly pulled up the little boy, who was very frightened; there were drops of blood on the fingers of his right hand, and his cheek was severely grazed. He was wet to the waist, and his face was overspread with a bluish pallor; but he smiled, then shuddered, and closed his eyes tightly, then smiled again, and said slowly:

"Howe—ver did I fa—all?"

"You must have been mad to do such a thing!" said the middle brother, putting his arm round him and wiping the blood off his face with a handkerchief; and the elder one said frowning:

"We had better go in. We can't hide it anyhow—"

"Will you be whipped?" I asked.

He nodded, and then he said, holding out his hand:

"How quickly you ran here!"

I was delighted by his praise, but I had no time to take his hand for he turned away to speak to his brothers again.

"Let us go in, or he will take cold. We will say that he fell down, but we need not say anything about the well."

"No," agreed the youngest, shuddering. "We will say I fell in a puddle, shall we?" And they went away.

All this happened so quickly that when I looked at the branch from which I had sprung into the yard, it was still shaking and throwing its yellow leaves about.

The brothers did not come into the yard again for a week, and when they appeared again they were more noisy than before; when the elder one saw me in the tree he called out to me kindly:

"Come here and play with us."

We gathered together, under the projecting roof of the storehouse, in the old sledge, and having surveyed one another thoughtfully, we held a long conversation.

"Did they whip you?" I asked.

"Rather!"

It was hard for me to believe that these boys were whipped like myself, and I felt aggrieved about it for their sakes.

"Why do you catch birds?" asked the youngest.

"Because I like to hear them sing."

"But you ought not to catch them; why don't you let them fly about as they like to?"

"Well, I 'm not going to, so there!"

"Won't you just catch one then and give it to me?"

"To you! . . . What kind?"

"A lively one, in a cage."

"A siskin . . . that 's what you want."

"The cat would eat it," said the youngest one; "and besides, papa would not allow us to have it."

"No, he would n't allow it," agreed the elder.

"Have you a mother?"

"No," said the eldest, but the middle one corrected him:

"We have a mother, but she is not ours really. Ours is dead."

"And the other is called a stepmother?" I said, and the elder nodded "Yes."

And they all three looked thoughtful, and their faces were clouded. I knew what a stepmother was like from the stories grandmother used to tell me, and I understood that sudden thoughtfulness. There they sat, all close together, as much alike as a row of peas in a pod; and I remembered the witch-stepmother who took the place of the real mother by means of a trick.

"Your real mother will come back to you again, see if she does n't," I assured them.

The elder one shrugged his shoulders.

"How can she if she is dead? Such things don't happen."

"Don't happen? Good Lord! how many times have the dead, even when they have been hacked to pieces, come to life again when sprinkled with living water?

How many times has death been neither real, nor the work of God, but simply the evil spell cast by a wizard or a witch!"

I began to tell grandmother's stories to them excitedly; but the eldest laughed at first, and said under his breath:

"We know all about those fairy-tales!"

His brothers listened in silence; the little one with his lips closely shut and pouting, and the middle one with his elbows on his knees, and holding his brother's hand which was round his neck.

The evening was far advanced, red clouds hung over the roof, when suddenly there appeared before us the old man with the white mustache and cinnamon-colored clothes, long, like those worn by a priest, and a rough fur cap.

"And who may this be?" he asked, pointing to me.

The elder boy stood up and nodded his head in the direction of grandfather's house:

"He comes from there."

"Who invited him in here?"

The boys silently climbed down from the sledge, and went into the house, reminding me more than ever of a flock of geese.

The old man gripped my shoulder like a vice and propelled me across the yard to the gate. I felt like crying through sheer terror, but he took such long,

quick steps that before I had time to cry we were in the street, and he stood at the little gate raising his finger at me threateningly, as he said:

"Don't you dare to come near me again!"

I flew into a rage.

"I never did want to come near you, you old devil!"

Once more I was seized by his long arm and he dragged me along the pavement as he asked in a voice which was like the blow of a hammer on my head:

"Is your grandfather at home?"

To my sorrow he proved to be at home, and he stood before the minacious old man, with his head thrown back and his beard thrust forward, looking up into the dull, round, fishy eyes as he said hastily:

"His mother is away, you see, and I am a busy man, so there is no one to look after him; so I hope you will overlook it this time, Colonel."

The Colonel raved and stamped about the house like a madman, and he was hardly gone before I was thrown into Uncle Peter's cart.

"In trouble again, young gentleman?" he asked as he unharnessed the horse. "What are you being punished for now?"

When I told him, he flared up.

"And what do you want to be friends with them for?" he hissed. "The young serpents! Look what

they have done for you! It is your turn now to blow on them; see you do it."

He whispered like this for a long time, and all sore from my beating as I was, I was inclined to listen to him at first; but his wrinkled face quivered in a way which became more and more repellent to me every moment, and reminded me that the other boys would be beaten too, and undeservedly, in my opinion.

"They ought not to be whipped; they are all good boys. As for you, every word you say is a lie," I said.

He looked at me, and then without any warning cried:

"Get out of my cart!"

"You fool!" I yelled, jumping down to the ground.

He ran after me across the yard, making unsuccessful attempts to catch me, and yelling in an uncanny voice:

"I am a fool, am I? I tell lies, do I? You wait till I get you!"

At this moment grandmother came out of the kitchen, and I rushed to her.

"This little wretch gives me no peace! I am five times older than he is, yet he dares to come and revile me . . . and my mother . . . and all."

Hearing him lie like this so brazenly, I lost my presence of mind, and could do nothing but stand

staring at him stupidly; but grandmother replied sternly:

"Now you are telling lies, Peter, there is no doubt about it. He would never be offensive to you or any one."

Grandfather would have believed the drayman!

From that day there was silent but none the less bitter warfare between us; he would try to hit me with his reins, without seeming to do it, he would let my birds out of their cage, and sometimes the cat would catch and eat them, and he would complain about me to grandfather on every possible occasion, and was always believed. I was confirmed in my first impression of him—that he was just a boy like myself disguised as an old man. I unplaited his bast shoes, or rather I ripped a little inside the shoes so that as soon as he put them on they began to fall to pieces; one day I put some pepper in his cap which set him sneezing for a whole hour, and trying with all his might not to leave off his work because of it.

On Sundays he kept me under observation, and more than once he caught me doing what was forbidden—talking to the Ovsyanikovs, and went and told tales to grandfather.

My acquaintance with the Ovsyanikovs progressed, and gave me increasing pleasure. On a little winding pathway between the wall of grandfather's house and

the Ovsyanikovs' fence grew elms and lindens, with some thick elder bushes, under cover of which I bored a semicircular hole in the fence, and the brothers used to come in turns, or perhaps two of them together, and, squatting or kneeling at this hole, we held long conversations in subdued tones; while one of them watched lest the Colonel should come upon us unawares.

They told me how miserable their existence was, and it made me sad to listen to them; they talked about my caged birds, and of many childish matters, but they never spoke a single word about their stepmother or their father, at least, as far as I can remember. More often than not they asked me to tell them a story, and I faithfully reproduced one of grandmother's tales, and if I forgot anything, I would ask them to wait while I ran to her and refreshed my memory. This pleased her.

I told them a lot about grandmother, and the eldest boy remarked once with a deep sigh:

"Your grandmother seems to be good in every way. . . . We had a good grandmother too, once."

He often spoke sadly like this, and spoke of things which had happened as if he had lived a hundred years instead of eleven. I remember that his hands were narrow, and his fingers very slender and delicate, and that his eyes were kind and bright, like the lights of the church lamps. His brothers were lovable too; they

seemed to inspire confidence and to make one want to do the things they liked; but the eldest one was my favorite.

Often I was so absorbed in our conversations that I did not notice Uncle Peter till he was close upon us, and the sound of his voice sent us flying in all directions as he exclaimed:

"A—gai—n?"

I noticed that his fits of taciturnity and moroseness became more frequent, and I very soon learned to see at a glance what mood he was in when he returned from work. As a rule he opened the gate in a leisurely manner, and its hinges creaked with a long-drawn-out, lazy sound; but when he was in a bad mood, they gave a sharp squeak, as if they were crying out in pain.

His dumb nephew had been married some time and had gone to live in the country, so Peter lived alone in the stables, in a low stall with a broken window and a close smell of hides, tar, sweat and tobacco; and because of that smell I would never enter his dwelling-place. He had taken to sleep with his lamp burning, and grandfather greatly objected to the habit.

"You see! You 'll burn me out, Peter."

"No, I shan't. Don't you worry. I stand the lamp in a basin of water at night," he would reply, with a sidelong glance.

He seemed to look askance at every one now, and had long given over attending grandmother's evenings and bringing her jam; his face seemed to be shriveling, his wrinkles became much deeper, and as he walked he swayed from side to side and shuffled his feet like a sick person.

One week-day morning grandfather and I were clearing away the snow in the yard, there having been a heavy fall that night, when suddenly the latch of the gate clanged loudly and a policeman entered the yard, closing the gate by setting his back against it while he beckoned to grandfather with a fat, gray finger. When grandfather went to him the policeman bent down so that his long-pointed nose looked exactly as if it were chiseling grandfather's forehead, and said something, but in such a low tone that I could not hear the words; but grandfather answered quickly:

"Here? When? Good God!"

And suddenly he cried, jumping about comically:

"God bless us! Is it possible?"

"Don't make so much noise," said the policeman sternly.

Grandfather looked round and saw me.

"Put away your spade, and go indoors," he said.

I hid myself in a corner and saw them go to the drayman's stall, and I saw the policeman take off his

right glove and strike the palm of his left hand with it as he said:

"He knows we 're after him. He left the horse to wander about, and he is hiding here somewhere."

I rushed into the kitchen to tell grandmother all about it; she was kneading dough for bread, and her floured head was bobbing up and down as she listened to me, and then said calmly:

"He has been stealing something, I suppose. You run away now. What is it to do with you?"

When I went out into the yard again grandfather was standing at the gate with his cap off, and his eyes raised to heaven, crossing himself. His face looked angry; he was bristling with anger, in fact, and one of his legs was trembling.

"*I told you to go indoors!*" he shouted, stamping at me; but he came with me into the kitchen, calling: "Come here, Mother!"

They went into the next room, and carried on a long conversation in whispers; but when grandmother came back to the kitchen I saw at once from her expression that something dreadful had happened.

"Why do you look so frightened?" I asked her.

"Hold your tongue!" she said quietly.

All day long there was an oppressive feeling about the house. Grandfather and grandmother frequently exchanged glances of disquietude, and spoke together,

softly uttering unintelligible, brief words which intensified the feeling of unrest.

"Light lamps all over the house, Mother," grandfather ordered, coughing.

We dined without appetite, yet hurriedly, as if we were expecting some one. Grandfather was tired, and puffed out his cheeks as he grumbled in a squeaky voice:

"The power of the devil over man! . . . You see it everywhere . . . even our religious people and ecclesiastics! . . . What is the reason of it, eh?"

Grandmother sighed.

The hours of that silver-gray winter's day dragged wearily on, and the atmosphere of the house seemed to become increasingly disturbed and oppressive. Before the evening another policeman came, a red, fat man, who sat by the stove in the kitchen and dozed, and when grandmother asked him: "How did they find this out?" he answered in a thick voice: "We find out everything, so don't you worry yourself!"

I sat at the window, I remember, warming an old two-kopeck piece in my mouth, preparatory to an attempt to make an impression on the frozen window-panes of St. George and the Dragon. All of a sudden there came a dreadful noise from the vestibule, the door was thrown open, and Petrovna shrieked deliriously:

"Look and see what you 've got out there!"

Catching sight of the policeman, she darted back into the vestibule; but he caught her by the skirt, and cried fearfully:

"Wait! Who are you? What are we to look for?"

Suddenly brought to a halt on the threshold, she fell on her knees and began to scream; and her words and her tears seemed to choke her:

"I saw it when I went to milk the cows . . . what is that thing that looks like a boot in the Kashmirins' garden? I said to myself—"

But at this grandfather stamped his foot and shouted:

"You are lying, you fool! You could not see anything in our garden, the fence is too high and there are no crevices. You are lying; there is nothing in our garden."

"Little Father, it is true!" howled Petrovna, stretching out one hand to him, and pressing the other to her head. "It is true, little Father . . . should I lie about such a thing? There were footprints leading to your fence, and the snow was all trampled in one place, and I went and looked through the fence and I saw . . . *him* . . . lying there . . ."

"Who? Who?"

This question was repeated over and over again,

but nothing more was to be got out of her. Suddenly they all made a dash for the garden, jostling each other as if they had gone mad; and there, by the pit, with the snow softly spread over him, lay Uncle Peter, with his back against the burnt beam and his head fallen on his chest. Under his right ear was a deep gash, red, like a mouth, from which jagged pieces of flesh stuck out like teeth.

I shut my eyes in horror at the sight, but I could see, through my eyelashes, the harness-maker's knife, which I knew so well, lying on Uncle Peter's knees, clutched in the dark fingers of his right hand; his left hand was cut off and was sinking into the snow. Under the drayman the snow had thawed, so that his diminutive body was sunk deep in the soft, sparkling down, and looked even more childlike than when he was alive. On the right side of the body a strange red design, resembling a bird, had been formed on the snow; but on the left the snow was untouched, and had remained smooth and dazzingly bright. The head had fallen forward in an attitude of submission, with the chin pressed against the chest, and crushing the thick curly beard; and amidst the red streams of congealed blood on the breast there lay a large brass cross. The noise they were all making seemed to set my head spinning. Petrovna never left off shrieking, the police-

man shouted orders to Valei as he sent him on an errand, and grandfather cried:

"Take care not to tread in his footprints!"

But he suddenly knit his brows, and looking on the ground said in a loud, imperious tone to the policeman: "There is nothing for you to kick up a row about, Constable! This is God's affair . . . a judgment from God . . . yet you must be fussing about some nonsense or other—bah!"

And at once a hush fell on them all; they stood still and, taking in a long breath, crossed themselves. Several people now came hastily into the garden from the yard. They climbed over Petrovna's fence and some of them fell down, and uttered exclamations of pain; but for all that they were quite quiet until grandfather cried in a voice of despair:

"Neighbors! why are you spoiling my raspberry bushes? Have you no consciences?"

Grandmother, sobbing violently, took my hand and brought me into the house.

"What did he do?" I asked.

"Could n't you see?" she answered.

For the rest of the evening, until far into the night, strangers tramped in and out of the kitchen and the other rooms talking loudly; the police were in command, and a man who looked like a deacon was making notes, and quacking like a duck:

"Wha—at? Wha—at?"

Grandmother offered them all tea in the kitchen, where, sitting at the table, was a rotund, whiskered individual, marked with smallpox, who was saying in a shrill voice:

"His real name we don't know . . . all that we can find out is that his birthplace was Elatma. As for the Deaf Mute . . . that is only a nickname . . . he was not deaf and dumb at all . . . he knew all about the business. . . . And there 's a third man in it too . . . we 've got to find him yet. They have been robbing churches for a long time; that was their lay."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Petrovna, very red, and perspiring profusely.

As for me, I lay on the ledge of the stove and looked down on them, and thought how short and fat and dreadful they all were.

CHAPTER X

EARLY one Saturday morning I made my way to Petrovna's kitchen-garden to catch robins. I was there a long time, because the pert red-breasts refused to go into the trap; tantalizingly beautiful, they hopped playfully over the silvery frozen snow, and flew on to the branches of the frost-covered bushes, scattering the blue snow-crystals all about. It was such a pretty sight that I forgot my vexation at my lack of success; in fact, I was not a very keen sportsman, for I took more pleasure in the incidents of the chase than in its results, and my greatest delight was to observe the ways of the birds and think about them. I was quite happy sitting alone on the edge of a snowy field listening to the birds chirping in the crystal stillness of the frosty day, when, faintly, in the distance, I heard the fleeting sounds of the bells of a troika—like the melancholy song of a skylark in the Russian winter.

I was benumbed by sitting in the snow, and I felt that my ears were frost-bitten, so I gathered up the trap and the cages, climbed over the wall into grandfather's garden, and made my way to the house.

The gate leading to the street was open, and a man

of colossal proportions was leading three steaming horses, harnessed to a large, closed sledge, out of the yard, whistling merrily the while. My heart leaped.

"Whom have you brought here?"

He turned and looked at me from under his arms, and jumped on to the driver's seat before he replied:

"The priest."

But I was not convinced; and if it *was* the priest, he must have come to see one of the lodgers.

"Gee-up!" cried the driver, and he whistled gaily as he slashed at the horses with his reins.

The horses tore across the fields, and I stood looking after them; then I closed the gate. The first thing I heard as I entered the empty kitchen was my mother's energetic voice in the adjoining room, saying very distinctly:

"What is the matter now? Do you want to kill me?"

Without taking off my outdoor clothes, I threw down the cages and ran into the vestibule, where I collided with grandfather; he seized me by the shoulder, looked into my face with wild eyes, and swallowing with difficulty, said hoarsely:

"Your mother has come back . . . go to her . . . wait . . . !" He shook me so hard that I was nearly taken off my feet, and reeled against the door of the room. "Go on! . . . Go . . . !"

I knocked at the door, which was protected by felt and oilcloth, but it was some time before my hand, benumbed with cold, and trembling with nervousness, found the latch; and when at length I softly entered, I halted on the threshold, dazed and bewildered.

"Here he is!" said mother. "Lord! how big he is grown. Why, don't you know me? . . . What a way you 've dressed him! . . . And, yes, his ears are going white! Make haste, Mama, and get some goose-grease."

She stood in the middle of the room, bending over me as she took off my outdoor clothes, and turning me about as if I were nothing more than a ball; her massive figure was clothed in a warm, soft, beautiful dress, as full as a man's cloak, which was fastened by black buttons, running obliquely from the shoulder to the hem of the skirt. I had never seen anything like it before.

Her face seemed smaller than it used to be, and her eyes larger and more sunken; while her hair seemed to be of a deeper gold. As she undressed me, she threw the garments across the threshold, her red lips curling in disgust, and all the time her voice rang out:

"Why don't you speak? Are n't you glad to see me? Phoo! what a dirty shirt. . . ."

Then she rubbed my ears with goose-grease, which

hurt; but such a fragrant, pleasant odor came from her while she was doing it, that the pain seemed less than usual.

I pressed close to her, looking up into her eyes, too moved to speak, and through her words I could hear grandmother's low, unhappy voice:

"He is so self-willed . . . he has got quite out of hand. He is not afraid of grandfather, even. . . . Oh, Varia! . . . Varia!"

"Don't whine, Mother, for goodness' sake; it does n't make things any better."

Everything looked small and pitiful and old beside mother. I felt old too, as old as grandfather.

Pressing me to her knees, and smoothing my hair with her warm, heavy hand, she said:

"He wants some one strict over him. And it is time he went to school. . . . You will like to learn lessons, won't you?"

"I 've learned all I want to know."

"You will have to learn a little more. . . . Why! How strong you 've grown!" And she laughed heartily in her deep contralto tones as she played with me.

When grandfather came in, pale as ashes, with bloodshot eyes, and bristling with rage, she put me from her and asked in a loud voice:

"Well, what have you settled, Father? Am I to go?"

He stood at the window scraping the ice off the panes with his finger-nails, and remained silent for a long while. The situation was strained and painful, and, as was usual with me in such moments of tension, my body felt as if it were all eyes and ears, and something seemed to swell within my breast, causing an intense desire to scream.

"Lexei, leave the room!" said grandfather roughly.

"Why?" asked mother, drawing me to her again. "You shall not go away from this place. I forbid it!" Mother stood up, gliding up the room, just like a rosy cloud, and placed herself behind grandfather.

"Listen to me, Papasha—"

He turned upon her, shrieking "Shut up!"

"I won't have you shouting at me," said mother coolly.

Grandmother rose from the couch, raising her finger admonishingly.

"Now, Varvara!"

And grandfather sat down, muttering:

"Wait a bit! I want to know who—? Eh? Who was it? . . . How did it happen?"

And suddenly he roared out in a voice which did not seem to belong to him:

"You have brought shame upon me, Varka!"

"Go out of the room!" grandmother said to me; and I went into the kitchen, feeling as if I were being

suffocated, climbed on to the stove, and stayed there a long time listening to their conversation, which was audible through the partition. They either all talked at once, interrupting one another, or else fell into a long silence as if they had fallen asleep. The subject of their conversation was a baby, lately born to my mother and given into some one's keeping; but I could not understand whether grandfather was angry with mother for giving birth to a child without asking his permission, or for not bringing the child to him.

He came into the kitchen later, looking dishevelled; his face was livid, and he seemed very tired. With him came grandmother, wiping the tears from her cheeks with the basque of her blouse. He sat down on a bench, doubled up, resting his hands on it, tremulously biting his pale lips; and she knelt down in front of him, and said quietly but with great earnestness:

"Father, forgive her! For Christ's sake forgive her! You can't get rid of her in this manner. Do you think that such things don't happen amongst the gentry, and in merchants' families? You know what women are. Now, forgive her! No one is perfect, you know."

Grandfather leaned back against the wall and looked into her face; then he growled, with a bitter laugh which was almost a sob:

"Well—what next? Who would n't you forgive?

I wonder! If you had your way every one would be forgiven. . . . Ugh! *You!*"

And bending over her he seized her by the shoulders and shook her, and said, speaking in a rapid whisper:

"But, by God, you need n't worry yourself. You will find no forgiveness in me. Here we are—almost in our graves—overtaken by punishment in our last days . . . there is neither rest nor happiness for us . . . nor will there be. . . . And what is more . . . mark my words! . . . we shall be beggars before we 're done—beggars!"

Grandmother took his hand, and sitting beside him laughed gently as she said:

"Oh, you poor thing! So you are afraid of being a beggar. Well, and suppose we do become beggars? All you will have to do is to stay at home while I go out begging. . . . They 'll give to me, never fear! . . . We shall have plenty; so you can throw that trouble aside."

He suddenly burst out laughing, moving his head about just like a goat; and seizing grandmother round the neck, pressed her to him, looking small and crumpled beside her.

"Oh, you fool!" he cried. "You blessed fool! . . . You are all that I 've got now! . . . You don't worry about anything because you don't understand. But you must look back a little . . . and remember

how you and I worked for them . . . how I sinned for their sakes . . . yet, in spite of all that, now—"

Here I could contain myself no longer; my tears would not be restrained, and I jumped down off the stove and flew to them, sobbing with joy because they were talking to each other in this wonderfully friendly fashion, and because I was sorry for them, and because mother had come, and because they took me to them, tears and all, and embraced me, and hugged me, and wept over me; but grandfather whispered to me:

"So you are here, you little demon! Well, your mother's come back, and I suppose you will always be with her now. The poor old devil of a grandfather can go, eh? And grandmother, who has spoiled you so . . . she can go to . . . eh? Ugh—*you!* . . ."

He put us away from him and stood up as he said in a loud, angry tone:

"They are all leaving us—all turning away from us. . . . Well, call her in. What are you waiting for? Make haste!"

Grandmother went out of the kitchen, and he went and stood in the corner, with bowed head.

"All-merciful God!" he began. "Well . . . Thou seest how it is with us!" And he beat his breast with his fist.

I did not like it when he did this; in fact the way

he spoke to God always disgusted me, because he seemed to be vaunting himself before his Maker.

When mother came in her red dress lighted up the kitchen, and as she sat down by the table, with grandfather and grandmother one on each side of her, her wide sleeves fell against their shoulders. She related something to them quietly and gravely, to which they listened in silence, and without attempting to interrupt her, just as if they were children and she were their mother.

Worn out by excitement, I fell fast asleep on the couch.

In the evening the old people went to vespers, dressed in their best. Grandmother gave a merry wink in the direction of grandfather, who was resplendent in the uniform he wore as head of the Guild, with a racoon pelisse over it, and his stomach sticking out importantly; and as she winked she observed to mother:

"Just look at father! Is n't he grand. . . . As spruce as a little goat." And mother laughed gaily.

When I was left alone with her in her room, she sat on the couch, with her feet curled under her, and pointing to the place beside her, she said:

"Come and sit here. Now, tell me—how do you like living here? Not much, eh?"

How did I like it?

"I don't know."

"Grandfather beats you, does he?"

"Not so much now."

"Oh? . . . Well, now, you tell me all about it . . . tell me whatever you like . . . well?"

As I did not want to speak about grandfather, I told her about the kind man who used to live in that room, whom no one liked, and who was turned out by grandfather. I could see that she did not like this story as she said:

"Well, and what else?"

I told her about the three boys, and how the Colonel had driven me out of his yard; and her hold upon me tightened as she listened.

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed with flashing eyes, and was silent a minute, gazing on the floor.

"Why was grandfather angry with you?" I asked.

"Because I have done wrong, according to him."

"In not bringing that baby here—?"

She started violently, frowning, and biting her lips; then she burst into a laugh and pressed me more closely to her, as she said:

"Oh, you little monster! Now, you are to hold your tongue about that, do you hear? Never speak about it—forget you ever heard it, in fact."

And she spoke to me quietly and sternly for some time; but I did not understand what she said, and

presently she stood up and began to pace the room, strumming on her chin with her fingers, and alternately raising and depressing her thick eyebrows.

A guttering tallow candle was burning on the table, and was reflected in the blank face of the mirror; murky shadows crept along the floor; a lamp burned before the icon in the corner; and the ice-clad windows were silvered by moonlight. Mother looked about her as if she were seeking something on the bare walls or on the ceiling.

"What time do you go to bed?"

"Let me stay a little longer."

"Besides, you have had some sleep to-day," she reminded herself.

"Do you want to go away?" I asked her.

"Where to?" she exclaimed, in a surprised tone; and raising my head she gazed for such a long time at my face that tears came into my eyes.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked.

"My neck aches."

My heart was aching too, for I had suddenly realized that she would not remain in our house, but would go away again.

"You are getting like your father," she observed, kicking a mat aside. "Has grandmother told you anything about him?"

"Yes."

"She loved Maxim very much—very much indeed; and he loved her—"

"I know."

Mother looked at the candle and frowned; then she extinguished it, saying: "That 's better!"

Yes, it made the atmosphere fresher and clearer, and the dark, murky shadows disappeared; bright blue patches of light lay on the floor, and golden crystals shone on the window-panes.

"But where have you lived all this time?"

She mentioned several towns, as if she were trying to remember something which she had forgotten long ago; and all the time she moved noiselessly round the room, like a hawk.

"Where did you get that dress?"

"I made it myself. I make all my own clothes."

I liked to think that she was different from others, but I was sorry that she so rarely spoke; in fact, unless I asked questions, she did not open her mouth.

Presently she came and sat beside me again on the couch; and there we stayed without speaking, pressing close to each other, until the old people returned, smelling of wax and incense, with a solemn quietness and gentleness in their manner.

We supped as on holidays, ceremoniously, exchanging very few words, and uttering those as if we were afraid of waking an extremely light sleeper.

Almost at once my mother energetically undertook the task of giving me Russian lessons. She bought some books, from one of which—"Kindred Words"—I acquired the art of reading Russian characters in a few days; but then my mother must set me to learn poetry by heart—to our mutual vexation.

The verses ran:

"Bolshaia doroga, priamaia doroga
Prostora ne malo beresh twi ou Boga
Tebia ne rovniali topor ee lopata
Miagka twi kopitou ee pwiliu bogata."

But I read "prostovo" for "prostora," and "roubili" for "rovniali," and "kopita" for "kopitou."

"Now, think a moment," said mother. "How could it be 'prostovo,' you little wretch? . . . 'Pro—sto—ra'; now do you understand?"

I did understand, but all the same I read "prostovo," to my own astonishment as much as hers.

She said angrily that I was senseless and obstinate. This made bitter hearing, for I was honestly trying to remember the cursed verses, and I could repeat them in my own mind without a mistake, but directly I tried to say them aloud they went wrong. I loathed the elusive lines, and began to mix the verses up on purpose, putting all the words which sounded alike together anyhow. I was delighted when, under the spell

I placed upon them, the verses emerged absolutely meaningless.

But this amusement did not go for long unpunished. One day, after a very successful lesson, when mother asked me if I had learned my poetry, I gabbled almost involuntarily:

"Doroga, dvouroga, tvorog, nedoroga,
Kopwita, popwito, korwito—"

I recollected myself too late. Mother rose to her feet, and resting her hands on the table, asked in very distinct tones:

"What is that you are saying?"

"I don't know," I replied dully.

"Oh, you know well enough!"

"It was just something—"

"Something what?"

"Something funny."

"Go into the corner."

"Why?"

"Go into the corner," she repeated quietly, but her aspect was threatening.

"Which corner?"

Without replying, she gazed so fixedly at my face that I began to feel quite flustered, for I did not understand what she wanted me to do. In one corner, under the icon, stood a small table on which was a vase con-

taining scented dried grass and some flowers; in another stood a covered trunk. The bed occupied the third, and there was no fourth, because the door came close up to the wall.

"I don't know what you mean," I said, despairing of being able to understand her.

She relaxed slightly, and wiped her forehead and her cheeks in silence; then she asked:

"Did n't grandfather put you in the corner?"

"When?"

"Never mind when! Has he ever done so?" she cried, striking the table twice with her hand.

"No—at least I don't remember it."

She sighed. "Phew! Come here!"

I went to her, saying: "Why are you so angry with me?"

"Because you made a muddle of that poetry on purpose."

I explained as well as I was able that I could remember it word for word with my eyes shut, but that if I tried to say it the words seemed to change.

"Are you sure you are not making that up?"

I answered that I was quite sure; but on second thoughts I was not so sure, and I suddenly repeated the verses quite correctly, to my own utter astonishment and confusion. I stood before my mother burning with shame; my face seemed to be swelling, my tingling

ears to be filled with blood, and unpleasant noises surged through my head. I saw her face through my tears, dark with vexation, as she bit her lips and frowned.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked in a voice which did not seem to belong to her. "So you did make it up?"

"I don't know. I did n't mean to!"

"You are very difficult," she said, letting her head droop. "Run away!"

She began to insist on my learning still more poetry, but my memory seemed to grow less capable every day of retaining the smooth, flowing lines, while my insane desire to alter or mutilate the verses grew stronger and more malevolent in proportion. I even substituted different words, by which I somewhat surprised myself, for a whole series of words which had nothing to do with the subject would appear and get mixed up with the correct words out of the book. Very often a whole line of the verse would seem to be obliterated, and no matter how conscientiously I tried, I could not get it back into my mind's eye. That pathetic poem of Prince Biazemskov (I think it was his) caused me a great deal of trouble:

> At eventide and early morn
> The old man, widow and orphan
> For Christ's sake ask for help from man.

But the last line:

At windows beg, with air forlorn.

I always rendered correctly. Mother, unable to make anything of me, recounted my exploits to grandfather, who said in an ominous tone:

"It is all put on! He has a splendid memory. He learned the prayers by heart with me. . . . He is making believe, that 's all. His memory is good enough. . . . Teaching him is like engraving on a piece of stone . . . that will show you how good it is! . . . You should give him a hiding."

Grandmother took me to task too.

"You can remember stories and songs . . . and are n't songs poetry?"

All this was true and I felt very guilty, but all the same I no sooner set myself to learn verses than from somewhere or other different words crept in like cockroaches, and formed themselves into lines.

"We too have beggars at our door,
Old men and orphans very poor.
They come and whine and ask for food,
Which they will sell, though it is good.
To Petrovna to feed her cows
And then on vodka will carouse."

At night, when I lay in bed beside grandmother, I used to repeat to her, till I was weary, all that I had

learned out of books, and all that I had composed myself. Sometimes she giggled, but more often she gave me a lecture.

"There now! You see what you can do. But it is not right to make fun of beggars, God bless them! Christ lived in poverty, and so did all the saints."

I murmured:

"Paupers I hate,
Grandfather too.
It 's sad to relate,
Pardon me, God!
Grandfather beats me
Whenever he can."

"What are you talking about? I wish your tongue may drop out!" cried grandmother angrily. "If grandfather could hear what you are saying—"

"He can hear if he likes."

"You are very wrong to be so saucy; it only makes your mother angry, and she has troubles enough without you," said grandmother gravely and kindly.

"What is the matter with her?"

"Never mind! You would n't understand."

"I know! It is because grandfather—"

"Hold your tongue, I tell you!"

My lot was a hard one, for I was desperately trying to find a kindred spirit, but as I was anxious that no one should know of this, I took refuge in being saucy

and disagreeable. The lessons with my mother became gradually more distasteful and more difficult to me. I easily mastered arithmetic, but I had not the patience to learn to write, and as for grammar, it was quite unintelligible to me.

But what weighed upon me most of all was the fact, which I both saw and felt, that it was very hard for mother to go on living in grandfather's house. Her expression became more sullen every day; she seemed to look upon everything with the eyes of a stranger. She used to sit for a long time together at the window overlooking the garden, saying nothing, and all her brilliant coloring seemed to have faded.

In lesson-time her deep-set eyes seemed to look right through me, at the wall, or at the window, as she asked me questions in a weary voice, and straightway forgot the answers; and she flew into rages with me much oftener—which hurt me, for mothers ought to behave better than any one else, as they do in stories.

Sometimes I said to her:

"You do not like living with us, do you?"

"Mind your own business!" she would cry angrily.

It began to dawn upon me that grandfather was up to something which worried grandmother and mother. He often shut himself up with mother in her room, and there we heard him wailing and squeaking like the wooden pipe of Nikanora, the one-sided shepherd,

which always affected me so unpleasantly. Once when one of these conversations was going on, mother shrieked so that every one in the house could hear her:

"I won't have it! I won't!"

And a door banged—and grandfather set up a howl.

This happened in the evening. Grandmother was sitting at the kitchen table making a shirt for grandfather and whispering to herself. When the door banged, she said, listening intently:

"O Lord! she has gone up to the lodgers."

At this moment grandfather burst into the kitchen, and rushing up to grandmother, gave her a blow on the head, and hissed as he shook his bruised fist at her:

"Don't you go chattering about things there 's no need to talk about, you old hag!"

"You are an old fool!" retorted grandmother quietly, as she put her knocked-about hair straight. "Do you think I am going to keep quiet? I 'll tell her everything I know about your plots always."

He threw himself upon her and struck at her large head with his fists.

Making no attempt to defend herself, or to strike him back, she said:

"Go on! Beat me, you silly fool! . . . That 's right! Hit me!"

I threw cushions and blankets at him from the couch, and the boots which were round the stove, but he was

in such a frenzy of rage that he did not heed them. Grandmother fell to the floor and he kicked her head, till he finally stumbled and fell down himself, overturning a pailful of water. He jumped up spluttering and snorting, glanced wildly round, and rushed away to his own room in the attic.

Grandmother rose with a sigh, sat down on the bench, and began to straighten her matted hair. I jumped off the couch, and she said to me in an angry tone:

"Put these pillows and things in their places. The idea! Fancy throwing pillows at any one! . . . And was it any business of yours? As for that old devil, he has gone out of his mind—the fool!"

Then she drew in her breath sharply, wrinkling up her face as she called me to her, and holding her head down said:

"Look! What is it that hurts me so?"

I put her heavy hair aside, and saw that a hairpin had been driven deep into the skin of her head. I pulled it out; but finding another one, my fingers seemed to lose all power of movement and I said: "I think I had better call mother. I am frightened."

She waved me aside.

"What is the matter? . . . Call mother indeed! I'll call you! . . . Thank God that she has heard and

seen nothing of it! As for you— Now then, get out of my way!"

And with her own flexible lace-worker's fingers she rummaged in her thick mane, while I plucked up sufficient courage to help her pull out two more thick, bent hairpins.

"Does it hurt you?"

"Not much. I 'll heat the bath to-morrow and wash my head. It will be all right then."

Then she began persuasively: "Now, my darling, you won't tell your mother that he beat me, will you? There is enough bad feeling between them without that. So you won't tell, will you?"

"No."

"Now, don't you forget! Come, let us put things straight. . . . There are no bruises on my face, are there? So that 's all right; we shall be able to keep it quiet."

Then she set to work to clean the floor, and I exclaimed, from the bottom of my heart:

"You are just like a saint . . . they torture you, and torture you, and you think nothing of it."

"What is that nonsense you are jabbering? Saint—? Where did you ever see one?"

And going on all fours, she kept muttering to herself, while I sat by the side of the stove and thought on ways and means of being revenged on grandfather. It

was the first time in my presence that he had beaten grandmother in such a disgusting and terrible manner. His red face and his dishevelled red hair rose before me in the twilight; my heart was boiling over with rage, and I was irritated because I could not think of an adequate punishment.

But a day or two after this, having been sent up to his attic with something for him, I saw him sitting on the floor before an open trunk, looking through some papers; while on a chair lay his favorite calendar—consisting of twelve leaves of thick, gray paper, divided into squares according to the number of days in the month, and in each square was the figure of the saint of the day. Grandfather greatly valued this calendar, and only let me look at it on those rare occasions when he was very pleased with me; and I was conscious of an indefinable feeling as I gazed at the charming little gray figures placed so close together. I knew the lives of some of them too—Kirik and Uliti, Barbara, the great martyr, Panteleimon, and many others; but what I liked most was the sad life of Alexei, the man of God, and the beautiful verses about him. Grandmother often repeated them to me feelingly. One might consider hundreds of such people and console oneself with the thought that they were all martyrs.

But now I made up my mind to tear up the calendar; and when grandfather took a dark blue paper to the

window to read it, I snatched up several leaves, and flying downstairs stole the scissors off grandmother's table, and throwing myself on the couch began to cut off the heads of the saints.

When I had beheaded one row I began to feel that it was a pity to destroy the calendar, so I decided to just cut out the squares; but before the second row was in pieces grandfather appeared in the doorway and asked:

"Who gave you permission to take away my calendar?"

Then seeing the squares of paper scattered over the table he picked them up, one after the other, holding each close to his face, then dropping it and picking up another; his jaw went awry, his beard jumped up and down, and he breathed so hard that the papers flew on to the floor.

"What have you done?" he shrieked at length, dragging me towards him by the foot.

I turned head over heels, and grandmother caught me, with grandfather striking her with his fist and screaming:

"I 'll kill him!"

At this moment mother appeared, and I took refuge in the corner of the stove, while she, barring his way, caught grandfather's hands, which were being flourished in her face, and pushed him away as she said:

"What is the meaning of this unseemly behavior? Recollect yourself."

Grandfather threw himself on the bench under the window, howling:

"You want to kill me. You are all against me—every one of you!"

"Are n't you ashamed of yourself?" My mother's voice sounded subdued. "Why all this pretense?"

Grandfather shrieked, and kicked the bench, with his beard sticking out funnily towards the ceiling and his eyes tightly closed; it seemed to me that he really was ashamed before mother, and that he was really pretending—and that was why he kept his eyes shut.

"I 'll gum all these pieces together on some calico, and they will look even better than before," said mother, glancing at the cuttings and the leaves. "Look—they were crumpled and torn; they had been lying about."

She spoke to him just like she used to speak to me in lesson-time when I could not understand something, and he stood up at once, put his shirt and waistcoat straight, in a business-like manner, expectorated and said:

"Do it to-day. I will bring you the other leaves at once."

He went to the door, but he halted on the threshold and pointed a crooked finger at me:

"And he will have to be whipped."

"That goes without saying," agreed mother, bending towards me. "Why did you do it?"

"I did it on purpose. He had better not beat grandmother again, or I 'll cut his beard off."

Grandmother, taking off her torn bodice, said, shaking her head reproachfully:

"Hold your tongue now, as you promised." And she spat on the floor. "May your tongue swell up if you don't keep it still!"

Mother looked at her, and again crossed the kitchen to me.

"When did he beat her?"

"Now, Varvara, you ought to be ashamed to ask him about it. Is it any business of yours?" said grandmother angrily.

Mother went and put her arm round her. "Oh, little mother—my dear little mother!"

"Oh, go away with your 'little mother'! Get away!"

They looked at each other in silence. Grandfather could be heard stamping about in the vestibule.

. . . . . .

When she first came home mother had made friends with the merry lady, the soldier's wife, and almost every evening she went up to the front room of the half-house, where she sometimes found people from

Betlenga House—beautiful ladies, and officers. Grandfather did not like this at all, and one day, as he was sitting in the kitchen, he shook his spoon at her threateningly and muttered:

"So you are starting your old ways, curse you! We don't get a chance of sleeping till the morning now."

He soon cleared the lodgers out, and when they had gone he brought from somewhere or other two loads of assorted furniture, placed it in the front room, and locked it up with a large padlock.

"We have no need to take lodgers," he said. "I am going to entertain on my own account now."

And so on Sundays and holidays visitors began to appear. There was grandmother's sister, Matrena Sergievna, a shrewish laundress with a large nose, in a striped silk dress and with hair dyed gold; and with her came her sons—Vassili, a long-haired draughtsman, good-natured and gay, who was dressed entirely in gray; and Victor, in all colors of the rainbow, with a head like a horse, and a narrow face covered with freckles, who, even while he was in the vestibule taking off his goloshes, sang in a squeaky voice just like Petrushka's: "Andrei-papà! Andrei-papà!" which occasioned me some surprise and alarm.

Uncle Jaakov used to come too, with his guitar, and accompanied by a bent, bald-headed man—a clock-winder, who wore a long, black frock-coat and

had a smooth manner; he reminded me of a monk. He used to sit in a corner with his head on one side, and smiling curiously as he tapped his shaven, clefted chin with his fingers. He was dark, and there was something peculiar in the way he stared at us with his one eye; he said very little, and his favorite expression was: "Pray don't trouble; it does n't matter in the least."

When I saw him for the first time I suddenly remembered one day long ago, while we were living in New Street, hearing the dull, insistent beating of a drum outside the gate, and seeing a night-cart, surrounded by soldiers and people in black, going from the prison to the square; and seated on a bench in the cart was a man of medium size, with a round cap made of woolen stuff, in chains—and upon his breast a black tablet was displayed, on which there were written some words in large white letters. The man hung his head as if he were reading what was written there, and he shook all over and his chains rattled. So when mother said to the winder: "This is my son," I shrank away from him in terror, and put my hands behind me.

"Pray don't trouble!" he said, and his whole mouth seemed to stretch, in a ghastly fashion, as far as his right ear, as he seized me by the belt, drew me to him, turned me round swiftly and lightly, and let me go.

"He 's all right. He 's a sturdy little chap."

I betook myself to the corner, where there was an armchair upholstered in leather—so large that one could lie in it; and grandfather used to brag about it, and call it "Prince Gruzincki's armchair"—and in this I settled myself and looked on, thinking that grown-up people's ideas of enjoyment were very boring, and that the way the clock-winder's face kept on changing was very strange, and was not calculated to inspire confidence.

It was an oily, flexible face, and it seemed to be melting and always softly on the move; if he smiled, his thick lips shifted to his right cheek, and his little nose turned that way too, and looked like a meat pasty on a plate. His great projecting ears moved strangely too, one being lifted every time he raised his eyebrow over his seeing eye, and the other moving in unison with his cheek-bone; and when he sneezed it seemed as if it were as easy to cover his nose with them as with the palm of his hand. Sometimes he sighed, and thrust out his dark tongue, round as a pestle, and licked his thick, moist lips with a circular movement. This did not strike me as being funny, but only as something wonderful, which I could not help looking at.

They drank tea with rum in it, which smelt like burnt onion tops; they drank liqueurs made by grandmother, some yellow like gold, some black like tar, some green; they ate curds, and buns made of butter, eggs

and honey; they perspired, and panted, and lavished praises on grandmother; and when they had finished eating, they settled themselves, looking flushed and puffy, decorously in their chairs, and languidly asked Uncle Jaakov to play.

He bent over his guitar and struck up a disagreeable, irritating song:

"Oh, we have been out on the spree,
The town rang with our voices free,
And to a lady from Kazan
We 've told our story, every man."

I thought this was a miserable song, and grandmother said:

"Why don't you play something else, Jaasha?—a real song! Do you remember, Matrena, the sort of songs we used to sing?"

Spreading out her rustling frock, the laundress reminded her:

"There 's a new fashion in singing now, Matushka."

Uncle looked at grandmother, blinking as if she were a long way off, and went on obstinately producing those melancholy sounds and foolish words.

Grandfather was carrying on a mysterious conversation with the clock-winder, pointing his finger at him; and the latter, raising his eyebrow, looked over to mother's side of the room and shook his head, and his mobile face assumed a new and indescribable shape.

Mother always sat between the Sergievnas, and as she talked quietly and gravely to Vassili, she sighed:

"Ye—es! That wants thinking about."

And Victor smiled the smile of one who has eaten to satiety, and scraped his feet on the floor; then he suddenly burst shrilly into song:

"Andrei-papà! Andrei-papà!"

They all stopped talking in surprise and looked at him; while the laundress explained in a tone of pride:

"He got that from the theater; they sing it there."

There were two or three evenings like this, made memorable by their oppressive dullness, and then the winder appeared in the daytime, one Sunday after High Mass. I was sitting with mother in her room helping her to mend a piece of torn beaded embroidery, when the door flew open unexpectedly and grandmother rushed into the room with a frightened face, saying in a loud whisper: "Varia, he has come!" and disappeared immediately.

Mother did not stir, not an eyelash quivered; but the door was soon opened again, and there stood grandfather on the threshold.

"Dress yourself, Varvara, and come along!"

She sat still, and without looking at him said:

"Come where?"

"Come along, for God's sake! Don't begin arguing.

He is a good, peaceable man, in a good position, and he will make a good father for Lexei."

He spoke in an unusually important manner, stroking his sides with the palms of his hands the while; but his elbows trembled, as they were bent backwards, exactly as if his hands wanted to be stretched out in front of him, and he had a struggle to keep them back.

Mother interrupted him calmly.

"I tell you that it can't be done."

Grandfather stepped up to her, stretching out his hands just as if he were blind, and bending over her, bristling with rage, he said, with a rattle in his throat:

"Come along, or I'll drag you to him— by the hair."

"You'll drag me to him, will you?" asked mother, standing up. She turned pale and her eyes were painfully drawn together as she began rapidly to take off her bodice and skirt, and finally, wearing nothing but her chemise, went up to grandfather and said:

"Now, drag me to him."

He ground his teeth together and shook his fist in her face:

"Varvara! Dress yourself at once!"

Mother pushed him aside with her hand, and took hold of the door handle.

"Well? Come along!"

"Curse you!" whispered grandfather.

"I am not afraid—come along!"

She opened the door, but grandfather seized her by her chemise and fell on his knees, whispering:

"Varvara! You devil! You will ruin us. Have you no shame?"

And he wailed softly and plaintively:

"Mo—ther! Mo—ther!"

Grandmother was already barring mother's way; waving her hands in her face as if she were a hen, she now drove her away from the door, muttering through her closed teeth:

"Varka! You fool! What are you doing? Go away, you shameless hussy!"

She pushed her into the room and secured the door with the hook; and then she bent over grandfather, helping him up with one hand and threatening him with the other.

"Ugh! You old devil!"

She sat him on the couch, and he went down all of a heap, like a rag doll, with his mouth open and his head waggling.

"Dress yourself at once, you!" cried grandmother to mother.

Picking her dress up from the floor, mother said:

"But I am not going to him—do you hear?"

Grandmother pushed me away from the couch.

"Go and fetch a basin of water. Make haste!"

She spoke in a low voice, which was almost a whisper, and with a calm, assured manner.

I ran into the vestibule. I could hear the heavy tread of measured footsteps in the front room of the half-house, and mother's voice came after me from her room:

"I shall leave this place to-morrow!"

I went into the kitchen and sat down by the window as if I were in a dream.

Grandfather groaned and shrieked; grandmother muttered; then there was the sound of a door being banged, and all was silent—oppressively so.

Remembering what I had been sent for, I scooped up some water in a brass basin and went into the vestibule. From the front room came the clock-winder with his head bent; he was smoothing his fur cap with his hand, and quacking. Grandmother with her hands folded over her stomach was bowing to his back, and saying softly:

"You know what it is yourself—you can't be forced to be nice to people."

He halted on the threshold, and then stepped into the yard; and grandmother, trembling all over, crossed herself and did not seem to know whether she wanted to laugh or cry.

"What is the matter?" I asked, running to her.

She snatched the basin from me, splashing the water over my legs, and cried:

"So this is where you come for water. Bolt the door!" And she went back into mother's room; and I went into the kitchen again and listened to them sighing and groaning and muttering, just as if they were moving a load, which was too heavy for them, from one place to another.

. . . . . .

It was a brilliant day. Through the ice-covered window-panes peeped the slanting beams of the winter sun; on the table, which was laid for dinner, was the pewter dinner-service; a goblet containing red kvass, and another with some dark-green vodka made by grandfather from betony and St. John's wort, gleamed dully. Through the thawed places on the window could be seen the snow on the roofs, dazzlingly bright and sparkling like silver on the posts of the fence. Hanging against the window-frame in cages, my birds played in the sunshine: the tame siskins chirped gaily, the robins uttered their sharp, shrill twitter, and the goldfinch took a bath.

But this radiant, silver day, in which every sound was clear and distinct, brought no joy with it, for it seemed out of place—everything seemed out of place. I was seized with a desire to set the birds free, and

was about to take down the cages when grandmother rushed in, clapping her hands to her sides, and flew to the stove, calling herself names.

"Curse you! Bad luck to you for an old fool, Akulina!"

She drew a pie out of the oven, touched the crust with her finger, and spat on the floor out of sheer exasperation.

"There you are—absolutely dried up! It is your own fault that it is burnt. Uch! Devil! A plague upon all your doings! Why don't you keep your eyes open, owl? . . . You are as unlucky as bad money!"

And she cried, and blew on the pie, and turned it over, first on this side, then on that, tapping the dry crust with her fingers, upon which her large tears splashed forlornly.

When grandfather and mother came into the kitchen she banged the pie on the table so hard that all the plates jumped.

"Look at that! That 's your doing . . . there 's no crust for you, top or bottom!"

Mother, looking quite happy and peaceful, kissed her, and told her not to get angry about it; while grandfather, looking utterly crushed and weary, sat down to table and unfolded his serviette, blinking, with the sun in his eyes, and muttered:

"That will do. It does n't matter. We have eaten

plenty of pies that were not spoilt. When the Lord buys He pays for a year in minutes . . . and allows no interest. Sit down, do, Varia! . . . and have done with it."

He behaved just as if he had gone out of his mind, and talked all dinner-time about God, and about ungodly Ahab, and said what a hard lot a father's was, until grandmother interrupted him by saying angrily:

"You eat your dinner . . . that's the best thing you can do!"

Mother joked all the time, and her clear eyes sparkled.

"So you were frightened just now?" she asked, giving me a push.

No, I had not been so frightened then, but now I felt uneasy and bewildered. As the meal dragged out to the weary length which was usual on Sundays and holidays, it seemed to me that these could not be the same people who, only half an hour ago, were shouting at each other, on the verge of fighting, and bursting out into tears and sobs. I could not believe, that is to say, that they were in earnest now, and that they were not ready to weep all the time. But those tears and cries, and the scenes which they inflicted upon one another, happened so often, and died away so quickly, that I began to get used to them, and they gradually ceased to excite me or to cause me heartache.

Much later I realized that Russian people, because of the poverty and squalor of their lives, love to amuse themselves with sorrow—to play with it like children, and are seldom ashamed of being unhappy.

Amidst their endless week-days, grief makes a holiday, and a fire is an amusement—a scratch is an ornament to an empty face.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER this incident mother suddenly asserted herself, made a firm stand, and was soon mistress of the house, while grandfather, grown thoughtful and quiet, and quite unlike himself, became a person of no account.

He hardly ever went out of the house, but sat all day up in the attic reading, by stealth, a book called "The Writings of My Father." He kept this book in a trunk under lock and key, and one day I saw him wash his hands before he took it out. It was a dumpy, fat book bound in red leather; on the dark blue title page a figured inscription in different colored inks flaunted itself: "To worthy Vassili Kashmirin, in gratitude, and sincere remembrance"; and underneath were written some strange surnames, while the frontispiece depicted a bird on the wing.

Carefully opening the heavy binding, grandfather used to put on his silver-rimmed spectacles, and gazing at the book, move his nose up and down for a long time, in order to get his spectacles at the right angle.

I asked him more than once what book it was that

he was reading, but he only answered in an impressive tone:

"Never mind. . . . Wait a bit, and when I die it will come to you. I will leave you my racoon pelisse too."

He began to speak to mother more gently, but less often; listening attentively to her speeches with his eyes glittering like Uncle Peter's, and waving her aside as he muttered:

"There! that's enough. Do what you like . . ."

In that trunk of his lay many wonderful articles of attire—skirts of silken material, padded satin jackets, sleeveless silk gowns, cloth of woven silver and headbands sewn with pearls, brightly colored lengths of material and handkerchiefs, with necklaces of colored stones. He took them all, panting as he went, to mother's room and laid them about on the chairs and tables—clothes were mother's delight—and he said to her:

"In our young days dress was more beautiful and much richer than it is now. Dress was richer, and people seemed to get on better together. But these times are past and cannot be called back . . . well, here you are; take them, and dress yourself up."

One day mother went to her room for a short time, and when she reappeared she was dressed in a dark

blue sleeveless robe, embroidered with gold, with a pearl head-band; and making a low obeisance to grandfather, she asked:

"Well, how does this suit you, my lord Father?"

Grandfather murmured something, and brightening wonderfully, walked round her, holding up his hands, and said indistinctly, just as if he were talking in his sleep:

"Ech! Varvara! . . . if you had plenty of money you would have the best people round you . . . !"

Mother lived now in two front rooms in the half-house, and had a great many visitors, the most frequent being the brothers Maximov: Peter, a well-set-up, handsome officer with a large, light beard and blue eyes —the very one before whom grandfather thrashed me for spitting on the old gentleman's head; and Eugen, also tall and thin, with a pale face and a small, pointed beard. His large eyes were like plums, and he was dressed in a green coat with gold buttons and gold letters on his narrow shoulders. He often tossed his head lightly, throwing his long, wavy hair back from his high, smooth forehead, and smiled indulgently; and whenever he told some story in his husky voice, he invariably began his speech with these insinuating words:

"Shall I tell you how it appears to me?"

Mother used to listen to him with twinkling eyes,

and frequently interrupted him laughingly with: "You are a baby, Eugen Vassilovitch—forgive me for saying so!"

And the officer, slapping his broad palms on his knees, would cry:

"A queer sort of baby!"

The Christmas holidays were spent in noisy gaiety, and almost every evening people came to see mother in full dress; or she put on gala dress—better than any of them wore—and went out with her guests.

Every time she left the house, in company with her gaily attired guests, it seemed to sink into the earth, and a terrifying silence seemed to creep into every corner of it. Grandmother flapped about the room like an old goose, putting everything straight. Grandfather stood with his back against the warm tiles of the stove, and talked to himself.

"Well . . . that will do . . . very good! . . . We 'll have a look and see what family . . ."

After the Christmas holidays mother sent Sascha, Uncle Michael's son, and me to school. Sascha's father had married again, and from the very first the stepmother had taken a dislike to her stepson, and had begun to beat him; so at grandmother's entreaty, grandfather had taken Sascha to live in his house. We went to school for a month, and all I learned, as far as I remember, was that when I was asked "What

is your surname?" I must not reply "Pyeshkov" simply, but "My surname is Pyeshkov." And also that I must not say to the teacher: "Don't shout at me, my dear fellow, I am not afraid of you!"

At first I did not like school, but my cousin was very pleased with it in the beginning, and easily made friends for himself; but once he fell asleep during a lesson, and suddenly called out in his sleep:

"I wo—on't!"

He awoke with a start and ran out of the class-room without ceremony. He was mercilessly laughed at for this; and the next day, when we were in the passage by Cyenvi Square, on our way to school, he came to a halt saying:

"You go on . . . I am not coming . . . I would rather go for a walk."

He squatted on his heels, carelessly dug his bundle of books into the snow, and went off. It was a clear January day, and the silver rays of the sun fell all round me. I envied my cousin very much, but, hardening my heart, I went on to school. I did not want to grieve my mother. The books which Sascha buried disappeared, of course, so he had a valid reason for not going to school the next day; but on the third day his conduct was brought to grandfather's notice. We were called up for judgment; in the kitchen grandfather, grandmother, and mother sat at the table and

cross-examined us—and I shall never forget how comically Sascha answered grandfather's questions.

"Why did n't you go to school?"

"I forgot where it was."

"Forgot?"

"Yes. I looked and looked—"

"But you went with Alexei; he remembered where it was."

"And I lost him."

"Lost Lexei?"

"Yes."

"How did that happen?"

Sascha reflected a moment, and then said, drawing in his breath:

"There was a snowstorm, and you could n't see anything."

They all smiled—and the atmosphere began to clear; even Sascha smiled cautiously. But grandfather said maliciously, showing his teeth:

"But you could have caught hold of his arm or his belt, could n't you?"

"I did catch hold of them, but the wind tore them away," explained Sascha.

He spoke in a lazy, despondent tone, and I listened uncomfortably to this unnecessary, clumsy lie, amazed at his obstinacy.

We were thrashed, and a former fireman, an old man

with a broken arm, was engaged to take us to school, and to watch that Sascha did not turn aside from the road of learning. But it was no use. The next day, as soon as my cousin reached the causeway, he stooped suddenly, and pulling off one of his high boots threw it a long way from him; then he took off the other and threw it in the opposite direction, and in his stockinged feet ran across the square. The old man, breathing hard, picked up the boots, and thereupon, terribly flustered, took me home.

All that day grandfather, grandmother, and my mother searched the town for the runaway, and it was evening before they found him in the bar at Tchirkov's Tavern, entertaining the public by his dancing. They took him home, and actually did not beat the shaking, stubborn, silent lad; but as he lay beside me in the loft, with his legs up and the soles of his feet scraping against the ceiling, he said softly:

"My stepmother does not love me, nor my father. Grandfather does not love me either; why should I live with them? So I shall ask grandmother to tell me where the robbers live, and I shall run away to them . . . then you will understand, all of you. . . . Why should n't we run away together?"

I could not run away with him, for in those days I had a work before me—I had resolved to be an officer with a large, light beard, and for that study was indis-

pensable. When I told my cousin of my plan, he agreed with me, on reflection.

"That 's a good idea too. By the time you are an officer I shall be a robber-chief, and you will have to capture me, and one of us will have to kill the other, or take him prisoner. I shan't kill you."

"Nor I you."

On that point we were agreed.

Then grandmother came in, and climbing on to the stove, glanced up at us and said:

"Well, little mice? E—ekh! Poor orphans! . . . Poor little mites!"

Having pitied us, she began to abuse Sascha's stepmother—fat Aunt Nadejda, daughter of the inn-keeper, going on to abuse stepmothers in general, and, apropos, told us the story of the wise hermit Iona, and how when he was but a lad he was judged, with his stepmother, by an act of God. His father was a fisherman of the White Lake:

"By his young wife his ruin was wrought,
A potent liquor to him she brought,
Made of herbs which bring sleep.
She laid him, slumbering, in a bark
Of oak, like a grave, so close and dark,
And plied the maple oars.
In the lake's center she dug a hole,
For there she had planned, in that dark pool,
To hide her vile witch deed.

Bent double she rocked from side to side,
And the frail craft o'erturned—that witch bride!
And her husband sank deep.
And the witch swam quickly to the shore
And fell to the earth with wailings sore,
And womanly laments.
The good folk all, believing her tale,
Wept with the disconsolate female,
And in bitterness cried:
'Oi! As wife thy life was all too brief!
O'erwhelmed art thou by wifely grief;
But life is God's affair.
Death too He sends when it doth please Him.'
Stepson Ionushka alone looked grim,
Her tears not believing.
With his little hand upon his heart
He swiftly at her these words did dart:
'Oi! Fateful stepmother!
Oi! Artful night-bird, born to deceive!
Those tears of yours I do not believe!
It is joy you feel not pain.
But we 'll ask our Lord, my charge to prove,
And the aid of all the saints above.
Let some one take a knife,
And throw it up to the cloudless sky;
Blameless you, to me the knife will fly.
If I am right, you die!'

. . . . . .

The stepmother turned her baleful gaze
On him, and with hate her eyes did blaze
As she rose to her feet.
And with vigor replied to the attack
Of her stepson, nor words did she lack.
'Oh! creature without sense!

Abortion you!—fit for rubbish heap!
By this invention, what do you reap?
  Answer you cannot give!'
The good folk looked on, but nothing said;
Of this dark business they were afraid.
  Sad and pensive they stood;
Then amongst themselves they held a debate,
And a fisherman old and sedate
  Bowing, advanced and said:
'In my right hand, good people, give me
A steel knife, which I will throw, and ye
  Shall see on whom it falls.'
A knife to his hand was their reply.
High above his gray head, to the sky,
  The sharp blade he did fling.
Like a bird, up in the air it went;
Vainly they waited for its descent,
  The crystal height scanning.
Their hats they doffed, and closer pressed they stood,
Silent; yea, Night herself seemed to brood;
  But the knife did not fall.
The ruby dawn rose over the lake,
The stepmother, flushed, did courage take
  And scornfully did smile.
When like a swallow the knife did dart
To earth, and fixed itself in her heart.

. . . . . .

Down on their knees the people did fall
Praising God Who is Ruler of All:
  'Thou are just, O God!'
Iona, the fisherman, did take,
And of him a hermit did make.

Far away by the bright River Kerjentza
In a cell almost invisible from the town Kiteja." [1]

The next day I woke up covered with red spots, and this was the beginning of small-pox.

They put me up in the back attic, and there I lay for a long time, blind, with my hands and feet tightly bandaged, living through horrible nightmares, in one of which I nearly died. No one but grandmother came near me, and she fed me with a spoon as if I were a baby, and told me stories, a fresh one every time, from her endless store.

One evening, when I was convalescent, and lay without bandages, except for my hands, which were tied up to prevent me from scratching my face, grandmother, for some reason or other, had not come at her usual time, which alarmed me; and all of a sudden I saw her. She was lying outside the door on the dusty floor of the attic, face downwards, with her arms outspread, and her neck half sawed through, like Uncle Peter's; while from the corner, out of the dusty twilight, there moved slowly towards her a great cat, with its green eyes greedily open. I sprang out of bed, bruising my legs and shoulders against the window-frame, and

[1] In the year '90 in the village of Kolinpanovka, in the Government of Tambov, and the district Borisoglebsk, I heard another version of this legend, in which the knife kills the stepson who has calumniated his stepmother.

jumped down into the yard into a snowdrift. It happened to be an evening when mother had visitors, so no one heard the smashing of the glass, or the breaking of the window-frame, and I had to lie in the snow for some time. I had broken no bones, but I had dislocated my shoulder and cut myself very much with the broken glass, and I had lost the use of my legs, and for three months I lay utterly unable to move. I lay still and listened, and thought how noisy the house had become, how often they banged the doors downstairs, and what a lot of people seemed to be coming and going.

Heavy snowstorms swept over the roof; the wind came and went resoundingly outside the door, sang a funereal song down the chimney, and set the dampers rattling; by day the rooks cawed, and in the quiet night the doleful howling of wolves reached my ears—such was the music under whose influence my heart developed. Later on shy spring peeped into the window with the radiant eyes of the March sun, timidly and gently at first, but growing bolder and warmer every day; she-cats sang and howled on the roof and in the loft; the rustle of spring penetrated the very walls—the crystal icicles broke, the half-thawed snow fell off the stable-roof, and the bells began to give forth a sound less clear than they gave in winter. When grandmother came near me her words were more often

impregnated with the odor of vodka, which grew stronger every day, until at length she began to bring a large white teapot with her and hide it under my bed, saying with a wink:

"Don't you say anything to that grandfather of ours, will you, darling?"

"Why do you drink?"

"Never mind! When you are grown-up you 'll know."

She pulled at the spout of the teapot, wiped her lips with her sleeve, and smiled sweetly as she asked:

"Well, my little gentleman, what do you want me to tell you about this evening?"

"About my father."

"Where shall I begin?"

I reminded her, and her speech flowed on like a melodious stream for a long time.

She had begun to tell me about my father of her own accord one day when she had come to me, nervous, sad, and tired, saying:

"I have had a dream about your father. I thought I saw him coming across the fields, whistling, and followed by a piebald dog with its tongue hanging out. For some reason I have begun to dream about Maxim Savatyevitch very often . . . it must mean that his soul is not at rest . . ."

For several evenings in succession she told me my

father's history, which was interesting, as all her stories were.

My father was the son of a soldier who had worked his way up to be an officer and was banished to Siberia for cruelty to his subordinates; and there—somewhere in Siberia—my father was born. He had an unhappy life, and at a very early age he used to run away from home. Once grandfather set the dogs to track him down in the forest, as if he were a hare; another time, having caught him, he beat him so unmercifully that the neighbors took the child away and hid him.

"Do they always beat children?" I asked, and grandmother answered quietly:

"Always."

My father's mother died early, and when he was nine years old grandfather also died, and he was taken by a cross-maker, who entered him on the Guild of the town of Perm and began to teach him his trade; but my father ran away from him, and earned his living by leading blind people to the fairs. When he was sixteen he came to Nijni and obtained work with a joiner who was a contractor for the Kolchin steamboats. By the time he was twenty he was a skilled carpenter, upholsterer and decorator. The workshop in which he was employed was next door to grandfather's house in Kovalikh Street.

"The fences were not high, and certain people were

not backward," said grandmother, laughing. "So one day, when Varia and I were picking raspberries in the garden, who should get over the fence but your father! . . . I was frightened, foolishly enough; but there he went amongst the apple trees, a fine-looking fellow, in a white shirt, and plush breeches . . . bare-footed and hatless, with long hair bound with leather bands. That 's the way he came courting. When I saw him for the first time through the window, I said to myself: 'That 's a nice lad!' So when he came close to me now I asked him:

" 'Why do you come out of your way like this, young man?'

"And he fell on his knees. 'Akulina,' he says, 'Ivanovna! . . . because my whole heart is here . . . with Varia. Help us, for God's sake! We want to get married.'

"At this I was stupefied and my tongue refused to speak. I looked, and there was your mother, the rogue, hiding behind an apple tree, all red—as red as the raspberries—and making signs to him; but there were tears in her eyes.

" 'Oh, you rogues!' I cried. 'How have you managed all this? Are you in your senses, Varvara? And you, young man,' I said, 'think what you are doing! Do you intend to get your way by force?'

"At that time grandfather was rich, for he had not

given his children their portions, and he had four houses of his own, and money, and he was ambitious; not long before that they had given him a laced hat and a uniform because he had been head of the Guild for nine years without a break—and he was proud in those days. I said to them what it was my duty to say, but all the time I trembled for fear and felt very sorry for them too; they had both become so gloomy. Then said your father:

" 'I know quite well that Vassili Vassilitch will not consent to give Varia to me, so I shall steal her; only you must help us.'

"So I was to help them. I could not help laughing at him, but he would not be turned from his purpose. 'You may stone me or you may help me, it is all the same to me—I shall not give in,' he said.

"Then Varvara went to him, laid her hand on his shoulder, and said: 'We have been talking of getting married a long time—we ought to have been married in May.'

"How I started! Good Lord!"

Grandmother began to laugh, and her whole body shook; then she took a pinch of snuff, dried her eyes and said, sighing comfortably:

"You can't understand that yet . . . you don't know what marrying means . . . but this you can understand—that for a girl to give birth to a child be-

fore she is married is a dreadful calamity. Remember that, and when you are grown-up never tempt a girl in that way; it would be a great sin on your part—the girl would be disgraced, and the child illegitimate. See that you don't forget that! You must be kind to women, and love them for their own sakes, and not for the sake of self-indulgence. This is good advice I am giving you."

She fell into a reverie, rocking herself in her chair; then, shaking herself, she began again:

"Well, what was to be done? I hit Maxim on the forehead, and pulled Varia's plait; but he said reasonably enough: 'Quarreling won't put things right.' And she said: 'Let us think what is the best thing to do first, and have a row afterwards.'

" 'Have you any money?' I asked him.

" 'I had some,' he replied, 'but I bought Varia a ring with it.'

" 'How much did you have then?'

" 'Oh,' says he, 'about a hundred roubles.'

"Now at that time money was scarce and things were dear, and I looked at the two—your mother and father—and I said to myself: 'What children! . . . What young fools!'

" 'I hid the ring under the floor,' said your mother, 'so that you should not see it. We can sell it.'

"Such children they were—both of them! How-

ever, we discussed the ways and means for them to be married in a week's time, and I promised to arrange the matter with the priest. But I felt very uncomfortable myself, and my heart went pit-a-pat, because I was so frightened of grandfather; and Varia was frightened too, painfully so. Well, we arranged it all!

"But your father had an enemy—a certain workman, an evil-minded man who had guessed what was going on long ago, and now watched our movements. Well, I arrayed my only daughter in the best things I could get, and took her out to the gate, where there was a troika waiting. She got into it, Maxim whistled, and away they drove. I was going back to the house, in tears, when I ran across this man, who said in a cringing tone:

" 'I have a good heart, and I shall not interfere with the workings of Fate; only, Akulina Ivanovna, you must give me fifty roubles for keeping quiet.'

"But I had no money; I did not like it, nor care to save it, and so I told him, like a fool:

" 'I have no money, so I can't give you any.'

" 'Well,' he said, 'you can promise it to me.'

" 'How can I do that? Where am I to get it from after I have promised?'

" 'Is it so difficult to steal from a rich husband?' he says.

" 'If I had not been a fool I should have temporized with him; but I spat full in his ugly mug, and went into the house. And he rushed into the yard and raised a hue and cry."

Closing her eyes, she said, smiling:

"Even now I have a lively remembrance of that daring deed of mine. Grandfather roared like a wild beast, and wanted to know if they were making fun of him. As it happened, he had been taking stock of Varia lately, and boasting about her: 'I shall marry her to a nobleman—a gentleman!' Here was a pretty nobleman for him!—here was a pretty gentleman! But the Holy Mother of God knows better than we do what persons ought to be drawn together.

"Grandfather tore about the yard as if he were on fire, calling Jaakov and Michael and even—at the suggestion of that wicked workman—Klima, the coachman too. I saw him take a leathern strap with a weight tied on the end of it, and Michael seized his gun. We had good horses then, full of spirit, and the carriage was light. 'Ah well!' I thought, 'they are sure to overtake them.' But here Varia's Guardian Angel suggested something to me. I took a knife and cut the ropes belonging to the shafts. 'There! they will break down on the road now.' And so they did. The shafts came unfastened on the way, and nearly killed grandfather and Michael—and Klima too, be-

sides delaying them; and by the time they had repaired it, and dashed up to the church, Varia and Maxim were standing in the church porch married—thank God!

"Then our people started a fight with Maxim; but he was in very good condition and he was rare and strong. He threw Michael away from the porch and broke his arm. Klima also was injured; and grandfather and Jaakov and that workman were all frightened!

"Even in his rage he did not lose his presence of mind, but he said to grandfather:

" 'You can throw away that strap. Don't wave it about over me, for I am a man of peace, and what I have taken is only what God gave me, and no man shall take from me . . . and that is all I have to say to you.'

"They gave it up then, and grandfather returned to the carriage crying:

" 'It is good-by now, Varvara! You are no daughter of mine, and I never wish to see you again, either alive or dead of hunger.'

"When he came home he beat me, and he scolded me; but all I did was to groan and hold my tongue.

"Everything passes away, and what is to be will be. After this he said to me:

" 'Now, look here, Akulina, you have no daughter now. Remember that.'

"But I only said to myself:

" 'Tell more lies, sandy-haired, spiteful man—say that ice is warm!' "

I listened attentively, greedily. Some part of her story surprised me, for grandfather had given quite a different account of mother's wedding; he said that he had been against the marriage and had forbidden mother to his house after it, but the wedding had not been secret, and he had been present in the church. I did not like to ask grandmother which of them spoke the truth, because her story was the more beautiful of the two, and I liked it best.

When she was telling a story she rocked from side to side all the time, just as if she were in a boat. If she was relating something sad or terrible, she rocked more violently, and stretched out her hands as if she were pushing away something in the air; she often covered her eyes, while a sightless, kind smile hid itself in her wrinkled cheek, but her thick eyebrows hardly moved. Sometimes this uncritical friendliness of hers to everybody touched my heart, and sometimes I wished that she would use strong language and assert herself more.

"At first, for two weeks, I did not know where

Varvara and Maxim were; then a little barefooted boy was sent to tell me. I went to see them on a Saturday—I was supposed to be going to vespers, but I went to them instead. They lived a long way off, on the Suetinsk Slope, in the wing of a house overlooking a yard belonging to some works—a dusty, dirty, noisy place; but they did not mind it—they were like two cats, quite happy, purring, and even playing together. I took them what I could—tea, sugar, cereals of various kinds, jam, flour, dried mushrooms, and a small sum of money which I had got from grandfather on the quiet. You are allowed to steal, you know, when it is not for yourself.

"But your father would not take anything. 'What! Are we beggars?' he says.

"And Varvara played the same tune. 'Ach! . . . What is this for, Mamasha?'

"I gave them a lecture. 'You young fools!' I said. 'Who am I, I should like to know? . . . I am the mother God gave you . . . and you, silly, are my own flesh and blood. Are you going to offend me? Don't you know that when you offend your mother on earth, the Mother of God in Heaven weeps bitterly?'

"Then Maxim seized me in his arms and carried me round the room . . . he actually danced—he was strong, the bear! And Varvara there, the hussy, was as proud as a peacock of her husband, and kept looking

at him as if he were a new doll, and talked about housekeeping with such an air—you would have thought she was an old hand at it! It was comical to listen to her. And she gave us cheese-cakes for tea which would have broken the teeth of a wolf, and curds all sprinkled with dust.

"Things went on like this for a long time, and your birth was drawing near, but still grandfather never said a word—he is obstinate, our old man! I went to see them on the quiet, and he knew it; but he pretended not to. It was forbidden to any one in the house to speak of Varia, so she was never mentioned. I said nothing about her either, but I knew that a father's heart could not be dumb for long. And at last the critical moment arrived. It was night; there was a snowstorm raging, and it sounded as if bears were throwing themselves against the window. The wind howled down the chimneys; all the devils were let loose. Grandfather and I were in bed but we could not sleep.

" 'It is bad for the poor on such a night as this,' I remarked; 'but it is worse for those whose minds are not at rest.'

"Then grandfather suddenly asked:

" 'How are they getting on? All right?'

" 'Who are you talking about?' I asked. 'About our daughter Varvara and our son-in-law Maxim?'

" 'How did you guess who I meant?'

" 'That will do, Father,' I said. 'Suppose you leave off playing the fool? What pleasure is to be got out of it?'

"He drew in his breath. 'Ach, you devil!' he said. 'You gray devil!'

"Later on he said: 'They say he is a great fool' (he was speaking of your father). 'Is it true that he is a fool?'

" 'A fool,' I said, 'is a person who won't work, and hangs round other people's necks. You look at Jaakov and Michael, for instance; don't they live like fools? Who is the worker in this house? Who earns the money? You! And are they much use as assistants?'

"Then he fell to scolding me—I was a fool, an abject creature and a bawd, and I don't know what else. I held my tongue.

" 'How can you allow yourself to be taken in by a man like that, when no one knows where he came from or what he is?'

"I kept quiet until he was tired, and then I said:

" 'You ought to go and see how they are living. They are getting along all right.'

" 'That would be doing them too much honor,' he said. 'Let them come here.'

"At this I cried for joy, and he loosened my hair (he loved to play with my hair) and muttered:

" 'Don't upset yourself, stupid. Do you think I have not got a heart?'

"He used to be very good, you know, our grandfather, before he got an idea into his head that he was cleverer than any one else, and then he became spiteful and stupid.

"Well, so they came, your father and mother, one Saint's Day—both of them large and sleek and neat; and Maxim stood in front of grandfather, who laid a hand on his shoulder—he stood there and he said:

" 'Don't think, Vassili Vassilitch, that I have come to you for a dowry; I have come to do honor to my wife's father.'

"Grandfather was very pleased at this, and burst out laughing. 'Ach!—you fighter!' he said. 'You robber! Well,' he said, 'we 'll be indulgent for once. Come and live with me.'

"Maxim wrinkled his forehead. 'That must be as Varia wishes,' he said. 'It is all the same to me.'

"And then it began. They were at each other tooth and nail all the time; they could not get on together anyhow. I used to wink at your father and kick him under the table, but it was no use; he would stick to

his own opinion. He had very fine eyes, very bright and clear, and his brows were dark, and when he drew them together his eyes were almost hidden, and his face became stony and stubborn. He would not listen to any one but me. I loved him, if possible, more than my own children, and he knew this and loved me too. Sometimes he would hug me, and catch me up in his arms, and drag me round the room, saying: 'You are my real mother, like the earth. I love you more than I love Varvara.' And your mother (when she was happy she was very saucy) would fly at him and cry: 'How dare you say such a thing, you rascal?' And the three of us would romp together. Ah! we were happy then, my dear. He used to dance wonderfully well too—and such beautiful songs he knew. He picked them up from the blind people; and there are no better singers than the blind.

"Well, they settled themselves in the outbuilding in the garden, and there you were born on the stroke of noon. Your father came home to dinner, and you were there to greet him. He was so delighted that he was almost beside himself, and nearly tired your mother out; as if he did not realize, the stupid creature, what an ordeal it is to bring a child into the world. He put me on his shoulder and carried me right across the yard to grandfather to tell him the news—that another grandson had appeared on the scene. Even grand-

father laughed: 'What a demon you are, Maxim!' he said.

"But your uncles did not like him. He did not drink wine, he was bold in his speech, and clever in all kinds of tricks—for which he was bitterly paid out. One day, for instance, during the great Fast, the wind sprang up, and all at once a terrible howling resounded through the house. We were all stupefied. What did it mean? Grandfather himself was terrified, ordered lamps to be lit all over the house, and ran about, shouting at the top of his voice: 'We must offer up prayers together!'

"And suddenly it stopped—which frightened us still more. Then Uncle Jaakov guessed. 'This is Maxim's doing, I am sure!' he said. And afterwards Maxim himself confessed that he had put bottles and glasses of various kinds in the dormer-window, and the wind blowing down the necks of the vessels produced the sounds, all by itself. 'These jokes will land you in Siberia again if you don't take care, Maxim,' said grandfather menacingly.

"One year there was a very hard frost and wolves began to come into the towns from the fields; they killed the dogs, frightened the horses, ate up tipsy watchmen, and caused a great panic. But your father took his gun, put on his snow-shoes, and tracked down two wolves. He skinned them, cleaned out their

heads, and put in glass eyes—made quite a good job of it, in fact. Well, Uncle Michael went into the vestibule for something, and came running back at once, with his hair on end, his eyes rolling, gasping for breath, and unable to speak. At length he whispered: 'Wolf!' Every one seized anything which came to hand in the shape of a weapon, and rushed into the vestibule with lights; they looked and saw a wolf's head sticking out from behind a raised platform. They beat him, they fired at him—and what do you think he was? They looked closer, and saw that it was nothing but a skin and an empty head, and its front feet were nailed to the platform. This time grandfather was really very angry with Maxim.

"And then Jaakov must begin to join in these pranks. Maxim cut a head out of cardboard, and made a nose, eyes, and a mouth on it, glued tow on it to represent hair, and then went out into the street with Jaakov, and thrust that dreadful face in at the windows; and of course people were terrified and ran away screaming. Another night they went out wrapped in sheets and frightened the priest, who rushed into a sentry-box; and the sentry, as much frightened as he was, called the police. And many other wanton tricks like this they played; and nothing would stop them. I begged them to give up their nonsense, and so did Varia, but it was no good; they would not leave off. Maxim only

laughed. It made his sides ache with laughing, he said, to see how folk ran wild with terror, and broke their heads because of his nonsense. 'Come and speak to them!' he would say.

"And it all came back on his own head and nearly caused his ruin. Your Uncle Michael, who was always with grandfather, was easily offended and vindictively disposed, and he thought out a way to get rid of your father. It was in the beginning of winter and they were coming away from a friend's house, four of them—Maxim, your uncles, and a deacon, who was degraded afterwards for killing a cabman. They came out of Yamski Street and persuaded Maxim to go round by the Dinkov Pond, pretending that they were going to skate. They began to slide on the ice like boys and drew him on to an ice-hole, and then they pushed him in—but I have told you about that."

"Why are my uncles so bad?"

"They are not bad," said grandmother calmly, taking a pinch of snuff. "They are simply stupid. Mischka is cunning and stupid as well, but Jaakov is a good fellow, taking him all round. Well, they pushed him into the water, but as he went down he clutched at the edge of the ice-hole, and they struck at his hands, crushing his fingers with their heels. By good luck he was sober, while they were tipsy, and with God's help he dragged himself from under the ice, and

kept himself face upwards in the middle of the hole, so that he could breathe; but they could not get hold of him, and after a time they left him, with his head surrounded by ice, to drown. But he climbed out, and ran to the police-station—it is quite close, you know, in the market-place. The Inspector on duty knew him and all the family, and he asked: 'How did this happen?' "

Grandmother crossed herself and went on in a grateful tone:

"God rest the soul of Maxim Savatyevitch! He deserves it, for you must know that he hid the truth from the police. 'It was my own fault,' he said. 'I had been drinking, and I wandered on to the pond, and tumbled down an ice-hole.'

" 'That 's not true,' said the Inspector; 'you 've not been drinking.'

"Well, the long and short of it was that they rubbed him with brandy, put dry clothes on him, wrapped him in a sheep-skin, and brought him home—the Inspector himself and two others. Jaaschka and Mischka had not returned; they had gone to a tavern to celebrate the occasion. Your mother and I looked at Maxim. He was quite unlike himself; his face was livid, his fingers were bruised, and there was dry blood on them, and his curls seemed to be flecked with snow—only it did not melt. He had turned gray!

"Varvara screamed out 'What have they done to you?'

"The Inspector, scenting the truth, began to ask questions, and I felt in my heart that something very bad had happened.

"I put Varia off on to the Inspector, and I tried to get the truth out of Maxim quietly. 'What has happened?'

" 'The first thing you must do,' he whispered, 'is to lie in wait for Jaakov and Michael and tell them that they are to say that they parted from me at Yamski Street and went to Pokrovski Street, while I turned off at Pryadilni Lane. Don't mix it up now, or we shall have trouble with the police.'

"I went to grandfather and said: 'Go and talk to the Inspector while I go and wait for our sons to tell them what evil has befallen us.'

"He dressed himself, all of a tremble, muttering: 'I knew how it would be! This is what I expected.'

"All lies! He knew nothing of the kind. Well, I met my children with my hands before my face. Fear sobered Mischka at once, and Jaashenka, the dear boy, let the cat out of the bag by babbling: 'I don't know anything about it. It is all Michael's doing. He is the eldest.'

"However, we made it all right with the Inspector. He was a very nice gentleman. 'Oh,' he says, 'but

you had better take care; if anything bad happens in your house I shall know who is to blame.' And with that he went away.

"And grandfather went to Maxim and said: 'Thank you! Any one else in your place would not have acted as you have done—that I know! And thank you, daughter, for bringing such a good man into your father's house.' Grandfather could speak very nicely when he liked. It was after this that he began to be silly, and keep his heart shut up like a castle.

"We three were left together. Maxim Savatyevitch began to cry, and became almost delirious. 'Why have they done this to me? What harm have I done them? Mama . . . why did they do it?' He never called me 'mamasha,' but always 'mama,' like a child . . . and he was really a child in character. 'Why . . . ?' he asked.

"I cried too—what else was there for me to do? I was so sorry for my children. Your mother tore all the buttons off her bodice, and sat there, all dishevelled as if she had been fighting, calling out: 'Let us go away, Maxim. My brothers are our enemies; I am afraid of them. Let us go away!'

"I tried to quieten her. 'Don't throw rubbish on the fire,' I said. 'The house is full of smoke without that.'

"At that very moment that fool of a grandfather must go and send those two to beg forgiveness; she sprang at Mischka and slapped his face. 'There 's your forgiveness!' she said. And your father complained: 'How could you do such a thing, brothers? You might have crippled me. What sort of a workman shall I be without hands?'

"However, they were reconciled. Your father was ailing for some time; for seven weeks he tossed about, and got no better, and he kept saying: 'Ekh! Mama, let us go to another town; I am weary of this place.'

"Then he had a chance of going to Astrakhan; they expected the Emperor there in the summer, and your father was entrusted with the building of a triumphal arch. They sailed on the first boat. It cut me to the heart to part from them, and he was grieved about it too, and kept saying to me that I ought to go with them to Astrakhan; but Varvara rejoiced, and did not even try to hide her joy—the hussy! And so they went away . . . and that is all!"

She drank a drop of vodka, took a pinch of snuff, and added, gazing out of the window at the dark blue sky:

"Yes, your father and I were not of the same blood, but in soul we were akin."

Sometimes, while she was telling me this, grand-

father came in with his face uplifted, sniffed the air with his sharp nose, and looking suspiciously at grandmother, listened to what she was saying and muttered:

"That 's not true! That 's not true!"

Then he would ask, without warning:

"Lexei, has she been drinking brandy here?"

"No."

"That 's a lie, for I saw her with my own eyes!" And he would go out in an undecided manner.

Grandmother would wink at him behind his back and utter some quaint saying:

"Go along, Avdye, and don't frighten the horses."

One day, as he stood in the middle of the room, staring at the floor, he said softly:

"Mother?"

"Aye?"

"You see what is going on?"

"Yes, I see!"

"What do you think of it?"

"There 'll be a wedding, Father. Do you remember how you used to talk about a nobleman?"

"Yes."

"Well—here he is!"

"He 's got nothing."

"That 's her business."

Grandfather left the room, and conscious of a sense of uneasiness, I asked:

"What were you talking about?"

"You want to know everything," she replied querulously, rubbing my feet. "If you know everything when you are young, there will be nothing to ask questions about when you get old." And she laughed and shook her head at me.

. . . . . .

"Oh, grandfather! grandfather! you are nothing but a little piece of dust in the eyes of God. Lenka —now don't you tell any one this, but grandfather is absolutely ruined. He lent a certain gentleman a large sum of money, and now the gentleman has gone bankrupt."

Smiling, she fell into a reverie, and sat without speaking for a long time; and her face became wrinkled, and sad, and gloomy.

"What are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking of something to tell you," she answered, with a start. "Shall we have the story about Evstignia? Will that do? Well, here goes then.

"A deacon there was called Evstignia,
He thought there was no one more wise than he,
Be he presbyter, or be he boyard;
Not even a huntsman knew more than he.
Like a spike of spear grass he held himself,
So proud, and taught his neighbors great and small;
He found fault with this, and grumbled at that;
He glanced at a church—'Not lofty enough!'

He passed up a street—'How narrow!' he said.
An apple he plucked—'It not red!' he said.
The sun rose too soon for Evstignia!
In all the world there was nothing quite right!"

Grandmother puffed out her cheeks, and rolled her eyes; her kind face assumed a stupid, comical expression as she went on in a lazy, dragging voice:

" 'There is nothing I could not do myself,
And do it much better, I think,' he said,
'If I only had a little more time!' "

She was smilingly silent for a moment, and then she continued:

"To the deacon one night some devils came;
'So you find it dull here, deacon?' they said.
'Well, come along with us, old fellow, to hell,
You 'll have no fault to find with the fires there.'
Ere the wise deacon could put on his hat
The devils seized hold of him with their paws
And, with titters and howls, they dragged him down.
A devil on each of his shoulders sat,
And there, in the flames of hell they set him.
'Is it all right, Evstignyeushka?'
The deacon was roasting, brightly he burned,
Kept himself up with his hands to his sides,
Puffed out his lips as he scornfully said:
'It 's dreadfully smoky down here—in hell!' "

Concluding in an indolent, low-pitched, unctuous voice, she changed her expression and, laughing quietly, explained:

"He would not give in—that Evstignia, but stuck to his own opinion obstinately, like our grandfather. . . . That 's enough now; go to sleep; it is high time."

Mother came up to the attic to see me very seldom, and she did not stay long, and spoke as if she were in a hurry. She was getting more beautiful, and was dressed better every day, but I was conscious of something different about her, as about grandmother; I felt that there was something going on which was being kept from me—and I tried to guess what it was.

Grandmother's stories interested me less and less, even the ones she told me about my father; and they did not soothe my indefinable but daily increasing alarm.

"Why is my father's soul not at rest?" I asked grandmother.

"How can I tell?" she replied, covering her eyes. "That is God's affair . . . it is supernatural . . . and hidden from us."

At night, as I gazed sleeplessly through the dark blue windows at the stars floating so slowly across the sky, I made up some sad story in my mind—in which the chief place was occupied by my father, who was always wandering about alone, with a stick in his hand, and with a shaggy dog behind him.

CHAPTER XII

ONE day I fell asleep before the evening, and when I woke up I felt that my legs had waked up too. I put them out of bed, and they became numb again; but the fact remained that my legs were cured and that I should be able to walk. This was such glorious news that I shouted for joy, and put my feet to the floor with the whole weight of my body on them. I fell down, but I crawled to the door and down the staircase, vividly representing to myself the surprise of those downstairs when they should see me.

I do not remember how I got into mother's room on my knees; but there were some strangers with her, and one, a dried-up old woman in green, said sternly, drowning all other voices:

"Give him some raspberry syrup to drink, and cover up his head."

She was green all over: her dress, and hat, and her face, which had warts under the eyes; even the tufts of hair on the warts were like grass. Letting her lower lip droop, she raised the upper one and looked at me with her green teeth, covering her eyes with a hand in a black thread mitten.

"Who is that?" I asked, suddenly growing timid.

Grandfather answered in a disagreeable voice:

"That 's another grandmother for you."

Mother, laughing, brought Eugen Maximov to me.

"And here is your father!"

She said something rapidly which I did not understand, and Maximov, with twinkling eyes, bent towards me and said:

"I will make you a present of some paints."

The room was lit up very brightly; silver candelabra, holding five candles each, stood on the table, and between them was placed grandfather's favorite icon—"Mourn not for me, Mother." The pearls with which it was set gave forth an intermittent brilliancy as the lights played on them flickeringly, and the gems in the golden crown shone radiantly; heavy, round faces like pancakes were pressing against the window-panes from outside, flattening their noses against the glass, and everything round me seemed to be floating. The old green woman felt my ears with her cold fingers and said:

"By all means! By all means!"

"He is fainting," said grandmother, and she carried me to the door.

But I was not fainting. I just kept my eyes shut, and as soon as she had half-dragged, half-carried me up the staircase, I asked:

"Why was n't I told of this?"

"That will do. . . . Hold your tongue!"

"You are deceivers—all of you!"

Laying me on the bed, she threw herself down with her head on the pillow and burst into tears, shaking from head to foot; her shoulders heaved, and she muttered chokingly:

"Why don't you cry?"

I had no desire to cry. It was twilight in the attic, and cold. I shuddered, and the bed shook and creaked; and ever before my eyes stood the old green woman. I pretended to be asleep, and grandmother went away.

Several uneventful days, all alike, flowed by like a thin stream. Mother had gone away somewhere after the betrothal, and the house was oppressively quiet.

One morning grandfather came in with a chisel and began to break away the cement around the attic window-frames which were put in for the winter; then grandmother appeared with a basin of water and a cloth, and grandfather asked softly:

"Well, old woman, what do you think of it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, are you pleased, or what?"

She answered him as she had answered me on the staircase:

"That will do. . . . Hold your tongue!"

The simplest words had a peculiar significance for me now, and I imagined that they concealed something of tremendous import and sorrow of which no one might speak, but of which every one knew.

Carefully taking out the window-frame, grandfather carried it away, and grandmother went to the window and breathed the air. In the garden the starling was calling; the sparrows chirped; the intoxicating odor of the thawing earth floated into the room. The dark blue tiles of the stove seemed to turn pale with confusion; it made one cold to look at them. I climbed down from the bed to the floor.

"Don't go running about with your feet bare," said grandmother.

"I am going into the garden."

"It is not dry enough there yet. Wait a bit!"

But I would not listen to her; in fact the very sight of grown-up people affected me unpleasantly now. In the garden the light green spikes of young grass were already pushing their way through, the buds on the apple trees were swelling and ready to break, the moss on the roof of Petrovna's cottage was very pleasing to the eye in its renewed green; all around were birds, and sounds of joy, and the fresh, fragrant air caused a pleasant sensation of giddiness. By the pit, where Uncle Peter cut his throat, there was long grass—red, and mixed up with the broken snow. I did not

like looking at it; there was nothing spring-like about it. The black chimney-stack reared itself up dejectedly, and the whole pit was an unnecessary eyesore. I was seized with an angry desire to tear up and break off the long grass, to pull the chimney-stack to pieces brick by brick, and get rid of all that useless muck, and to build a clean dwelling for myself in the pit, where I could live all the summer without grown-up people.

I had no sooner thought of it than I set myself to do it, and it immediately diverted my mind from what went on in the house, and kept it occupied for a long time; and although many things occurred to upset me, they became of less importance to me every day.

"What are you sulking about?" mother and grandmother used to ask me; and it made me feel awkward when they asked this question, for I was not angry with them—it was simply that every one in the house had become a stranger to me. At dinner, at evening tea, and supper the old, green woman often appeared —looking just like a rotten paling in an old fence. The eyes seemed to be sewn on her face with invisible threads, and looked as if they would easily roll out of their bony sockets, as she turned them rapidly in every direction, seeing and taking notes of everything—raising them to the ceiling when she talked of God, and looking down her nose when she spoke of household

matters. Her eyebrows looked exactly as if they had been cut out of pieces and stuck on. Her large, protruding teeth noiselessly chewed whatever she put in her mouth with a funny curve of her arm, and her little finger stuck out; while the bones about her ears moved like little round balls, and the green hairs on her warts went up and down as if they were creeping along her yellow, wrinkled, disgustingly clean skin.

She was always so very clean—like her son, and it was unpleasant to go near them. The first day she put her dead hand against my lips, it smelled strongly of yellow Kazan soap and incense, and I turned away and ran off. She said to her son very often:

"That boy is greatly in need of discipline; do you understand that, Jenia?"

Inclining his head obediently, he would frown and remain silent. Every one frowned in the presence of the green woman.

I hated the old woman, and her son too, with an intense hatred, and many blows did that feeling cost me. One day at dinner she said, rolling her eyes horribly:

"Oh—Aleshenka, why do you eat in such a hurry, and take such big pieces? Give it up, my dear!"

I took the piece out of my mouth, put it on the fork again, and handed it to her.

"Take it—only it is hot."

Mother took me away from the table, and I was

ignominiously banished to the attic, where grandmother joined me, trying to keep her giggling from being heard by placing her hand over her mouth.

"Lor! you are a cheeky young monkey. Bless you!"

It irritated me to see her with her hand over her mouth, so I ran away, climbed on the roof of the house, and sat there a long time by the chimney. Yes, I wanted to be insolent and to use injurious words to them all, and it was hard to fight against this feeling, but it had to be fought against.

One day I covered the chair of my future stepfather with grease, and that of my new grandmother with cherry-gum, and they both stuck to their seats; it was very funny, but when grandfather had hit me, mother came up to me in the attic, and drawing me to her, pressed me against her knees saying:

"Listen now! Why are you so ill-natured? If you only knew how miserable it makes me." And her eyes overflowed with bright tears as she pressed my head against her cheek.

This was very painful; I had rather she had struck me. I told her I would never again be rude to the Maximovs—never again, if only she would not cry.

"There, there!" she said softly. "Only you must not be impudent. Very soon we shall be married, and then we shall go to Moscow; afterwards we shall come back and you will live with us. Eugen Vassilivitch is

very kind and clever, and you will get on well with him. You will go to a grammar school, and afterwards you shall be a student—like he is now; then you shall be a doctor—whatever you like. You may study whatever you choose. Now run and play."

These "afterwards" and "thens" one after the other seemed to me like a staircase leading to some place deep down and far away from her, into darkness and solitude —a staircase which led to no happiness for me. I had a good mind to say to my mother:

"Please don't get married. I will earn money for your keep."

But somehow the words would not come. Mother always aroused in me many tender thoughts about herself, but I never could make up my mind to tell them to her.

My undertaking in the garden was progressing; I pulled up the long grass, or cut it down with a knife, and I built, with pieces of brick, against the edge of the pit where the earth had fallen away, a broad seat, large enough, in fact, to lie down upon. I took a lot of pieces of colored glass and fragments of broken crockery and stuck them in the chinks between the bricks, and when the sun looked into the pit they all shone with a rainbow effect, like one sees in churches.

"Very well thought out!" said grandfather one day, looking at my work. "Only you have broken off the

grass and left the roots. Give me your spade and I will dig them up for you; come, bring it to me!"

I brought him the yellow spade; he spat on his hands, and making a noise like a duck, drove the spade into the earth with his foot.

"Throw away the roots," he said. "Later on I will plant some sunflowers here for you, and some raspberry bushes. That will be nice—very nice!" And then, bending over his spade, he fell into a dead silence.

I looked at him; fine tear-drops were falling fast from his small, intelligent, doglike eyes to the ground.

"What is the matter?"

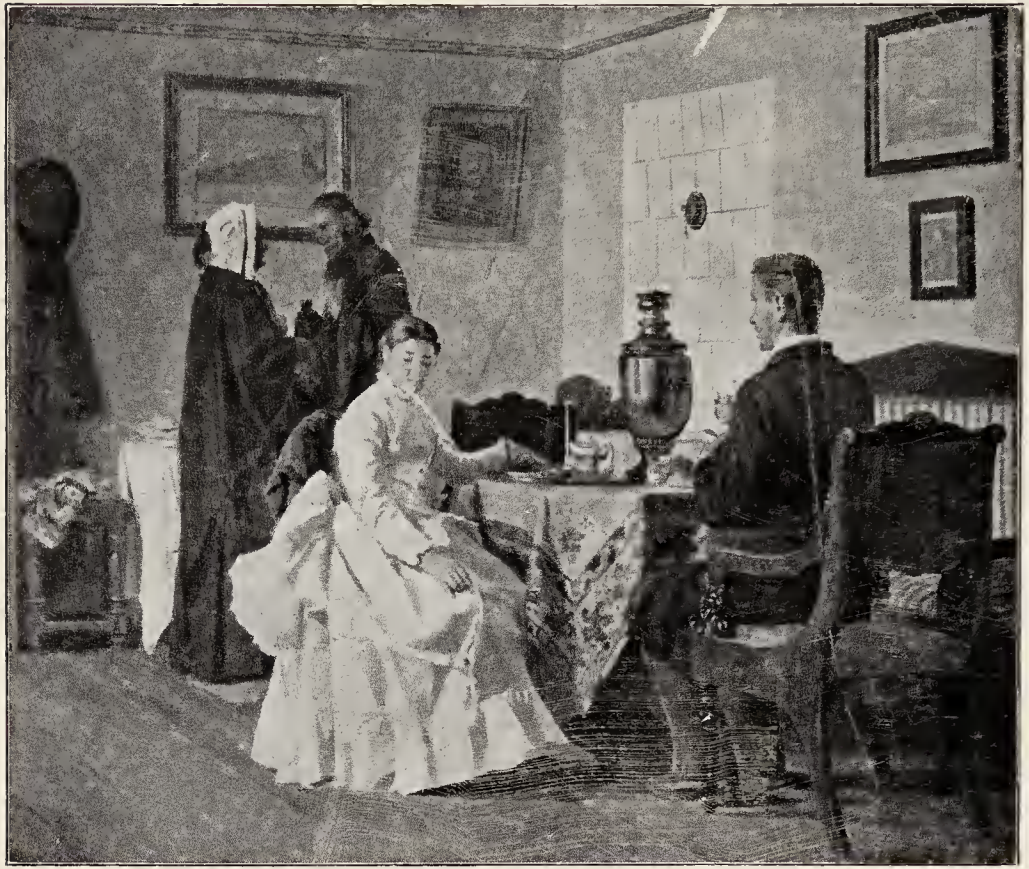
He shook himself, wiped his face with his palms, and dimly regarded me.

"I was sweating. Look there—what a lot of worms!"

Then he began to dig again, and after a time he said abruptly:

"You have done all this for nothing—for nothing, my boy. I am going to sell the house soon. I must sell it before autumn without fail. I want the money for your mother's dowry. That 's what it is! I hope she will be happy. God bless her!"

He threw down the spade, and with a gesture of renunciation went behind the washhouse where he had



WHEN THEY CAME BACK FROM CHURCH THEY DRANK TEA IN A DEPRESSED MANNER

a forcing-bed, and I began to dig; but almost at once I crushed my toes with the spade.

This prevented me from going to the church with mother when she was married; I could only get as far as the gate, and from there I saw her on Maximov's arm, with her head bowed, carefully setting her feet on the pavement and on the green grass, and stepping over the crevices as if she were walking on sharp nails.

It was a quiet wedding. When they came back from church they drank tea in a depressed manner, and mother changed her dress directly and went to her own room to pack up. My stepfather came and sat beside me, and said:

"I promised to give you some paints, but there are no good ones to be got in this town, and I cannot give my own away; but I will bring you some from Moscow."

"And what shall I do with them?"

"Don't you like drawing?"

"I don't know how to draw."

"Well, I will bring you something else."

Then mother came in.

"We shall soon come back, you know. Your father, there, has to sit for an examination, and when he has finished his studies we shall come back."

I was pleased that they should talk to me like this,

as if I were grown-up; but it was very strange to hear that a man with a beard was still learning.

"What are you learning?" I asked.

"Surveying," he replied.

I did not trouble to ask what surveying was. The house seemed to be full of a dull quietness; there was a woolly sort of rustling going on, and I wished that the night would make haste and come. Grandfather stood with his back pressed against the stove, gazing out of the window with a frown. The old green woman was helping mother to pack, grumbling and sighing; and grandmother, who had been tipsy since noon, ashamed on that account, had retired to the attic and shut herself up there.

Mother went away early the next morning. She held me in her arms as she took leave of me; lifting me lightly off the ground, and gazing into my eyes with eyes which seemed unfamiliar to me, she said as she kissed me:

"Well—good-by."

"Tell him that he has got to obey me," said grandfather gruffly, looking up at the sky which was still rosy.

"Do what grandfather tells you," said mother, making the sign of the Cross over me.

I expected her to say something else, and I was furious with grandfather because he had prevented her.

They seated themselves in the droshky, and mother was a long time angrily trying to free her skirt which had got caught in something.

"Help her, can't you? Are you blind?" said grandfather to me.

But I could not help—I was too wrapped up in my grief.

Maximov patiently squeezed his long legs, clothed in dark blue trousers, into the droshky, while grandmother put some bundles into his hand. He piled them up on his knees,and keeping them in place with his chin, his white face wrinkled with embarrassment, he drawled: "That 's eno—ugh!"

In another droshky sat the old green woman with her eldest son, the officer, who was scratching his beard with his sword handle, and yawning.

"So you are going to the war?" said grandfather.

"I am compelled to go."

"A good thing too! . . . we must beat the Turks."

They drove off. Mother turned round several times and waved her handkerchief. Grandmother, dissolved in tears, supporting herself by resting her hand against the wall, also waved her hand. Grandfather wiped away the tears from his eyes and muttered brokenly: "No good—will come—of this."

I sat on the gate-post and watched the droshky jolting up and down—and then they turned the corner and

it seemed as if a door in my heart had been suddenly shut and barred. It was very early, the shutters had not been taken from the windows of the houses, the street was empty; I had never seen such an utter absence of life. In the distance the shepherd could be heard playing irritatingly.

"Come in to breakfast," said grandfather, taking me by the shoulder. "It is evident that your lot is to live with me; so you are beginning to leave your mark on me like the striking of a match leaves on a brick."

From morning till night we busied ourselves in the garden; he laid out beds, tied up the raspberry bushes, stripped the lichen off the apple trees, and killed the caterpillars, while I went on building and decorating my dwelling. Grandfather cut off the end of the burnt beam, made sticks out of it, and stuck them in the earth, and I hung my bird-cages on them; then I wove a close netting with the dried grass, and made a canopy over the seat to keep off the sun and the dew. The result was very satisfactory.

"It is very useful," said grandfather, "for you to learn how to make the best of things for yourself."

I attached great importance to his words. Sometimes he lay down on the seat, which I had covered with turf, and taught me, very slowly, as if he had a difficulty in finding words.

"Now you are cut right off from your mother;

other children will come to her, and they will be more to her than you are. And grandmother there—she has taken to drink."

He was silent for a long time as if he were listening to something; then again he unwillingly let fall gloomy words:

"This is the second time she has taken to drink; when Michael went for a soldier she started to drink too. And the old fool persuaded me to buy his discharge. . . . He might have turned out quite differently if he had gone for a soldier. . . . Ugh! . . . *You* . . . ! I shall be dead soon—that means that you will be left alone . . . all on your own . . . to earn your living. Do you understand? . . . Good! . . . You must learn to work for yourself . . . and don't give way to others! Live quietly, peaceably—and uprightly. Listen to what others say, but do what is best for yourself."

All the summer, except, of course, when the weather was bad, I lived in the garden, and on warm nights I even slept out there on a piece of felt which grandmother had made me a present of; not infrequently she slept in the garden herself, and bringing out a bundle of hay, which she spread out close to my couch, she would lie down on it and tell me stories for a long time, interrupting her speech from time to time by irrelevant remarks:

"Look! . . . A star fell then! That is some pure soul suffering . . . a mother thinking of earth! That means that a good man or woman has just been born."

Or she would point out to me:

"There 's a new star appeared; look! It looks like a large eye. . . . Oh, you bright creature of the sky! . . . You holy ornament of God! . . ."

"You will catch cold, you silly woman!" grandfather would growl, "and have an apoplectic fit. Thieves will come and kill you."

Sometimes, when the sun set, rivers of light streamed across the sky, looking as if they were on fire, and red-gold ashes seemed to fall on the velvety-green garden; then everything became perceptibly a shade darker, and seemed to grow larger—to swell, as the warm twilight closed round. Tired of the sun, the leaves drooped, the grass bowed its head; everything seemed to be softer and richer, and gently breathed out various odors as soothing as music. And music there was, too, floating from the camps in the fields, where they were playing spasmodically.

Night came, and with it there came into one's heart something vigorous and fresh, like the loving caress of a mother; the quietness softly smoothed one's heart with its warm, rough hands, and all that ought to be forgotten—all the bitterness, the fine dust of the day—was washed away. It was enchanting to lie with up-

turned face watching the stars flaming in the infinite profundity of the sky—a profundity which, as it stretches higher and higher, opens out a new vista of stars; to raise yourself lightly from the ground and—how strange!—either the earth has grown smaller before your eyes, or you yourself, grown wonderfully big, are being absorbed into your surroundings. It grows darker and quieter every moment, but there is a succession of minute, hardly perceptible, prolonged sounds, and each sound—whether it be a bird singing in its sleep, or a hedgehog running along, or a human voice softly raised somewhere—differs from the sounds of daytime, and has something peculiarly its own, amorously underlying its sensitive quietness.

A harmonium is being played somewhere, a woman's laugh rings out, a sword rattles on the stone flags of the pavement, a dog yelps—but all these sounds are nothing more than the falling of the last leaves of the day which has blossomed and died.

Sometimes in the night a drunken cry would suddenly rise from the field or the street, and the sound of some one running noisily; but this was a common occurrence, and passed unheeded.

Grandmother never slept long, and as she lay with her head resting on her folded arms, she would begin, at the slightest hint, to tell me a story, obviously not caring whether I was listening to her or not. She was

always able to choose stories which would make the night still more precious and beautiful to me.

Under the influence of her measured flow of words I insensibly sank into slumber, and awoke with the birds; the sun was looking straight into my eyes, and, warmed by his rays, the morning air flowed softly round us, the leaves of the apple tree were shaking off the dew, the moist green grass looked brighter and fresher than ever, with its newly acquired crystal transparency, and a faint mist floated over it. High up in the sky, so high as to be invisible, a lark sang, and all the colors and sounds produced by the dew evoked a peaceful gladness, and aroused a desire to get up at once and do some work, and to live in amity with all living creatures.

This was the quietest and most contemplative period of my whole life, and it was during this summer that the consciousness of my own strength took root and developed in me. I became shy and unsociable, and when I heard the shouts of the Ovsyanikov children I had no desire to go to them; and when my cousins came, I was more than a little annoyed, and the only feeling they aroused in me was the fear lest they should destroy my structure in the garden—the first work I had ever done by myself.

Grandfather's conversation, drier, more querulous, and more doleful every day, had lost all interest for

me. He had taken to quarreling with grandmother frequently, and to turn her out of the house, when she would go either to Uncle Jaakov's or to Uncle Michael's. Once she stayed away for several days and grandfather did all the cooking himself, burned his hands, roared with pain, swore, and smashed the crockery, and developed a noticeable greediness. Sometimes he would come to my hut, make himself comfortable on the turfy seat, and after watching me in silence for some time, would ask abruptly:

"Why are you so quiet?"

"Because I feel like it. Why?"

Then he would begin his sermon:

"We are not gentlefolk. No one takes the trouble to teach us. We have got to find everything out for ourselves. For other folk they write books, and build schools; but no time is wasted on us. We have to make our own way."

And he fell into a brooding silence—sitting motionless, oblivious, till his presence became almost oppressive.

He sold the house in the autumn, and not long before the sale he exclaimed abruptly one morning, over his tea:

"Well, Mother, I have fed and clothed you—fed and clothed you—but the time has come for you to earn your own bread."

Grandmother received this announcement quite calmly, as if she had been expecting it a long time. She reached for her snuff-box in a leisurely manner, charged her spongy nose, and said:

"Well, that 's all right! If it is to be like that, so let it be."

Grandfather took two dark rooms in the basement of an old house, at the foot of a small hill.

When we went to this lodging, grandmother took an old bast shoe, put it under the stove, and, squatting on her heels, invoked the house-demon:

"House-demon, family-demon, here is your sledge; come to us in our new home, and bring us good luck."

Grandfather looked in at the window from the yard, crying: "I will make you smart for this, you heretic! You are trying to put me to shame."

"Oie! Take care that you don't bring harm to yourself, Father," said grandmother seriously; but he only raged at her, and forbade her to invoke the house-demon.

The furniture and effects were sold by him to a second-hand dealer who was a Tartar, after three days' bargaining and abuse of each other; and grandmother looked out of the window, sometimes crying and sometimes laughing, and exclaiming under her breath:

"That 's right! Drag them about. Smash them."

I was ready to weep myself as I mourned for my garden and my little hut.

We journeyed thither in two carts, and the one wherein I was placed, amongst various utensils, jolted alarmingly, as if it were going to throw me out then and there, with a part of the load. And for two years, till close upon the time of my mother's death, I was dominated with the idea that I had been thrown out somewhere. Soon after the move mother made her appearance, just as grandfather had settled down in his basement, very pale and thin, and with her great eyes strangely brilliant. She stared just as if she were seeing her father and mother and me for the first time—just stared, and said nothing; while my stepfather moved about the room, whistling softly, and clearing his throat, with his hands behind his back and his fingers twitching.

"Lord! how dreadfully you have grown," said mother to me, pressing her hot hands to my cheeks. She was dressed unattractively in a full brown dress, and she looked very swollen about the stomach.

My stepfather held out his hand to me.

"How do you do, my lad? How are you getting on?" Then sniffing the air, he added: "Do you know it is very damp down here?"

They both looked worn out, as if they had been

running for a long time; their clothes were in disorder, and soiled, and all they wanted, they said, was to lie down and rest. As they drank some tea with an air of constraint, grandfather, gazing at the rain-washed windows, asked:

"And so you have lost everything in a fire?"

"Everything!" answered my stepfather in a resolute tone. "We only escaped ourselves by good luck."

"So! . . . A fire is no joke."

Leaning against grandmother's shoulder, my mother whispered something in her ear, and grandmother blinked as if the light were in her eyes. The air of constraint grew more noticeable.

Suddenly grandfather said very clearly, in a cool, malicious tone:

"The rumor which came to my ears, Eugen Vassilev, my good sir, said that there was no fire, but that you simply lost everything at cards."

There was a dead silence, broken only by the hissing of the samovar and the splashing of the rain against the window-panes; at length mother said in a persuasive tone:

"Papasha—"

"What do you mean—'*papasha*'?" cried grandfather in a deafening voice. "What next? Did n't I tell you that a person of thirty does not go well with one of twenty years? . . . There you are . . . and

there he is—cunning rogue! A nobleman! . . . What? . . . Well, little daughter?"

They all four shouted at the tops of their voices, and my stepfather shouted loudest of all. I went out to the porch and sat on a heap of wood, stupefied by my amazement at finding mother so changed, so different from what she used to be. This fact had not struck me so forcibly when I was in the room with her, as it did now in the twilight with the memory of what she had been clearly before my mind.

Later on, though I have forgotten the circumstances connected with it, I found myself at Sormova, in a house where everything was new; the walls were bare and hemp grew out of the chinks between the beams, and in the hemp were a lot of cockroaches. Mother and my stepfather lived in two rooms with windows looking on to the street, and I lived with grandmother in the kitchen, which had one window looking out on the roof. On the other side of the roof the chimneys of a factory rose up to the sky, belching forth a thick smoke, and the winter wind blew this smoke over the entire village; and our cold rooms were always filled with the odor of something burning. Early in the morning the wolves howled: "Khvou—ou—ou—u—!"

By standing on a stool one could see through the top window-pane, across the roof, the gate of the fac-

tory lit up by lanterns, half-open like the black, toothless mouth of an old beggar, and a crowd of little people crawling into it. At noon the black lips of the gate again opened and the factory disgorged its chewed-up people, who flowed along the street in a black stream till a rough, snowy wind came flying along and drove them into their houses. We very seldom saw the sky over the village; from day to day, over the roofs of the houses, and over the snow-drifts sprinkled with soot, hung another roof, gray and flat, which crushed the imagination, and blinded one with its overwhelming drabness.

In the evenings a dim red glow quivered over the factory, lighting up the chimney-pots, and making the chimneys look, not as if they rose from the earth to the sky, but as if they were falling to the earth from that smoky cloud; and as they fell they seemed to be breathing out flames, and howling.

It was unbearably tedious to look at all this, and the monotony of it preyed evilly on my heart. Grandmother did the work of a general servant, cooked, washed the floors, chopped wood, and fetched water from morning till night, and came to bed weary, grumbling, and sighing. Sometimes when she had finished cooking she would put on her short, padded bodice, and with her skirt well lifted, she would repair to the town.

"I will go and have a look at the old man, and see how he is getting on."

"Take me with you."

"You would be frozen. Look how it is snowing!" And she would walk seven versts, by the roads, or across the snowy fields.

Mother, yellow, pregnant, and shivering with cold, went about wrapped in a gray, torn shawl with a fringe.

I hated that shawl, which disfigured the large, well-built body; I hated the tails of the fringe, and tore them off; I hated the house, the factory, and the village. Mother went about in downtrodden felt boots, coughing all the time, and her unbecomingly fat stomach heaved, her gray-blue eyes had a bright, hard gleam in them, and she often stood about against the bare walls just as if she were glued to them. Sometimes she would stand for a whole hour looking out of the window on to the street, which was like a jaw in which half the teeth were blackened and crooked from age, and the other half had quite decayed and had been replaced by false ones.

"Why do we live here?" I asked.

"Ach! . . . You hold your tongue, can't you?" she answered.

She spoke very seldom to me, and when she did speak it was only to order me about:

"Go there! . . . Come here! . . . Fetch this!"

I was not often allowed out in the street, and on each occasion I returned home bearing signs of having been knocked about by other boys; for fighting was my favorite, indeed, my only enjoyment, and I threw myself into it with ardor. Mother whipped me with a strap, but the punishment only irritated me further, and the next time I fought with childish fury—and mother gave me a worse punishment. This went on till one day I warned her that if she did not leave off beating me I should bite her hand, and run away to the fields and get frozen to death. She pushed me away from her in amazement, and walked about the room, panting from exhaustion as she said:

"You are getting like a wild animal!"

That feeling which is called love began to blossom in my heart now, full of life, and tremulous as a rainbow; and my resentment against every one burst out oftener, like a dark blue, smoky flame, and an oppressive feeling of irritation smoldered in my heart—a consciousness of being entirely alone in that gray, meaningless existence.

My stepfather was severe with me, and hardly ever speaking to mother, went about whistling or coughing, and after dinner would stand in front of a mirror and assiduously pick his uneven teeth with a splinter of wood. His quarrels with mother became more frequent—angrily addressing her as "you" (instead of

"thou"), a habit which exasperated me beyond measure. When there was a quarrel on he used to shut the kitchen door closely, evidently not wishing me to hear what he said, but all the same the sound of his deep bass voice could be heard quite plainly. One day he cried, with a stamp of his foot:

"Just because you are fool enough to become pregnant, I can't ask any one to come and see me—you cow!"

I was so astonished, so furiously angry, that I jumped up in the air so high that I knocked my head against the ceiling and bit my tongue till it bled.

On Saturdays workmen came in batches of ten to see my stepfather and sell him their food-tickets, which they ought to have taken to the shop belonging to the works to spend in place of money; but my stepfather used to buy them at half-price. He received the workmen in the kitchen, sitting at the table, looking very important, and as he took the cards he would frown and say:

"A rouble and a half!"

"Now, Eugen Vassilev, for the love of God—"

"A rouble and a half!"

This muddled, gloomy existence only lasted till mother's confinement, when I was sent back to grandfather. He was then living at Kunavin, where he rented a poky room with a Russian stove, and two win-

dows looking on to the yard, in a two-storied house on a sandy road, which extended to the fence of the Napolno churchyard.

"What 's this?" he cried, squeaking with laughter, as he met me. "They say there 's no better friend than your own mother; but now, it seems, it is not the mother but the old devil of a grandfather who is the friend. Ugh—*you!*"

Before I had time to look about my new home grandmother arrived with mother and the baby. My stepfather had been dismissed from the works for pilfering from the workmen, but he had gone after other employment and had been taken on in the booking-office of the railway station almost at once.

After a long, uneventful period, once more I was living with mother in the basement of a storehouse. As soon as she was settled mother sent me to school—and from the very first I took a dislike to it.

I went thither in mother's shoes, with a coat made out of a bodice belonging to grandmother, a yellow shirt, and trousers which had been lengthened. My attire immediately became an object of ridicule, and for the yellow shirt I received "The ace of diamonds."

I soon became friendly with the boys, but the master and the priest did not like me.

The master was a jaundiced-looking, bold man who suffered from a continuous bleeding of the nose; he

"MOTHER SENT ME TO SCHOOL—AND FROM THE FIRST I TOOK A DISLIKE TO IT"

used to appear in the schoolroom with his nostrils stopped up with cotton-wool, and as he sat at his table, asking us questions in snuffling tones, he would suddenly stop in the middle of a word, take the wool out of his nostrils and look at it, shaking his head. He had a flat, copper-colored face, with a sour expression, and there was a greenish tint in his wrinkles; but it was his literally pewter-colored eyes which were the most hideous feature of it, and they were so unpleasantly glued to my face that I used to feel that I must brush them off my cheek with my hands.

For several days I was in the first division, and at the top of the class, quite close to the master's table, and my position was almost unbearable. He seemed to see no one but me, and he was snuffling all the time:

"Pyesh—kov, you must put on a clean shirt. Pyesh—kov, don't make a noise with your feet. Pyesh—kov, your bootlaces are undone again."

But I paid him out for his savage insolence. One day I took the half of a frozen watermelon, cut out the inside, and fastened it by a string over a pulley on the outer door. When the door opened the melon went up, but when my teacher shut the door the hollow melon descended upon his bald head like a cap. The janitor was sent with me with a note to the headmaster's house, and I paid for my prank with my own skin.

Another time I sprinkled snuff over his table, and he sneezed so much that he had to leave the class and send his brother-in-law to take his place. This was an officer who set the class singing: "God save the Czar!" and "Oh, Liberty! my Liberty!" Those who did not sing in tune he rapped over the head with a ruler, which made a funny, hollow noise, but it hurt.

The Divinity teacher, the handsome, young, luxuriant-haired priest, did not like me because I had no Bible, and also because I mocked his way of speaking. The first thing he did when he entered the classroom was to ask me:

"Pyeshkov, have you brought that book or not? Yes. The book!"

"No," I answered, "I have not brought it. Yes."

"What do you mean—yes?"

"No."

"Well, you can just go home. Yes—home, for I don't intend to teach you. Yes! I don't intend to do it."

This did not trouble me much. I went out and kicked my heels in the dirty village street till the end of the lesson, watching the noisy life about me.

This priest had a beautiful face, like a Christ, with caressing eyes like a woman's, and little hands—gentle, like everything about him. Whatever he handled—a book, a ruler, a penholder, whatever it might be—

he handled carefully, as if it were alive and very fragile, and as if he loved it and were afraid of spoiling it by touching it. He was not quite so gentle with the children, but all the same they loved him.

Notwithstanding the fact that I learned tolerably well, I was soon told that I should be expelled from the school for unbecoming conduct. I became depressed, for I saw a very unpleasant time coming, as mother was growing more irritable every day, and beat me more than ever.

But help was at hand. Bishop Khrisanph [1] paid an unexpected visit to the school. He was a little man, like a wizard, and, if I remember rightly, was humpbacked.

Sitting at the table, looking so small in his wide black clothes, and with a funny hat like a little pail on his head, he shook his hands free from his sleeves and said:

"Now, children, let us have a talk together."

And at once the classroom became warm and bright, and pervaded by an atmosphere of unfamiliar pleasantness.

[1] The author of the famous work, in three volumes, entitled "Religions of the Ancient World," and the article on "Egyptian Metempsychosis," as well as several articles of public interest such as "Concerning Marriage, and Women." That last article made a deep impression on me when I read it in my youth. It seems to me that I have not remembered its title correctly, but it was published in some theological journal in the seventies.

Calling me to the table, after many others had had their turns, he asked me gravely:

"And how old are you? Is that all? Why, what a tall boy you are! I suppose you have been standing out in the rain pretty often, have you? Eh?"

Placing one dried-up hand with long, sharp nails on the table, and catching hold of his sparse beard with the fingers of the other, he placed his face, with its kind eyes, quite close to mine, as he said:

"Well, now tell me which you like best of the Bible stories."

When I told him that I had no Bible and did not learn Scripture history, he pulled his cowl straight, saying:

"How is that? You know it is absolutely necessary for you to learn it. But perhaps you have learned some by listening? You know the Psalms? Good! And the prayers? . . . There, you see! And the lives of the Saints too? . . . In rhyme? . . . Then I think you are very well up in the subject."

At this moment our priest appeared—flushed and out of breath. The Bishop blessed him, but when he began to speak about me, he raised his hand, saying:

"Excuse me . . . just a minute. . . . Now, tell me the story of Alexei, the man of God.

"Fine verses those—eh, my boy?" he said, when I came to a full stop, having forgotten the next verse.

"Let us have something else now—something about King David. . . . Go on, I am listening very attentively."

I saw that he was really listening, and that the verses pleased him. He examined me for a long time, then he suddenly stood up and asked quickly:

"You have learned the Psalms? Who taught you? A good grandfather, is he? Eh? Bad? You don't say so! . . . But are n't you very naughty?"

I hesitated, but at length I said:

"Yes."

The teacher and the priest corroborated my confession garrulously, and he listened to them with his eyes cast down; then he said with a sigh:

"You hear what they say about you? Come here!"

Placing his hand, which smelt of cypress wood, on my head, he asked:

"Why are you so naughty?"

"It is so dull learning."

"Dull? Now, my boy, that is not true. If you found it dull you would be a bad scholar, whereas your teachers testify that you are a very apt pupil. That means that you have another reason for being naughty."

Taking a little book from his breast, he said as he wrote in it:

"Pyeshkov, Alexei. There! . . . All the same, my boy, you must keep yourself in hand, and try not to be too naughty. . . . We will allow you to be just a little naughty; but people have plenty to plague them without that. Is n't it so, children?"

Many voices answered gaily:

"Yes."

"But I can see that you are not very naughty yourselves. Am I right?"

And the boys laughingly answered all together:

"No. We are very naughty too—very!"

The Bishop leaned over the back of a chair, drew me to him, and said surprisingly, causing us all—even the teacher and the priest—to laugh:

"It is a fact, my brothers—that when I was your age I was very naughty too. What do you think of that?"

The children laughed, and he began to ask them questions, adroitly contriving to muddle them, so that they began to answer each other; and the merriment redoubled. At length he stood up, saying:

"Well, it is very nice to be with you, but it is time for me to go now."

Raising his hand and throwing back his sleeve, he made the sign of the Cross over us all with one wide gesture, and blessed us:

"In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and

of the Holy Ghost, I bless you and your labors. Good-by!"

They all cried:

"Good-by, my lord. Come again soon."

Shaking his cowl, he said:

"I shall come again. I shall come again, and bring you some little books."

And he said to the teacher as he sailed out of the classroom:

"Let them go home now."

He led me by the hand to the porch, where he said quietly, bending down to me:

"So you will hold yourself in, won't you? . . . Is that settled? . . . I understand why you are naughty, you know. . . . Good-by, my boy!"

I was very excited; my heart was seething with strange feelings, and when the teacher, having dismissed the rest of the class, kept me in to tell me that now I ought to be quieter than water and humbler than grass, I listened to him attentively and willingly.

The priest, putting on his fur-coat, chimed in gently:

"And from to-day you will have to assist at my lessons. Yes, you 'll have to. And sit still too. Yes—sit still."

But while matters were improving at school, an unpleasant incident occurred at home. I stole a rouble

from mother. The crime had been committed without forethought. One evening mother went out and left me to keep house and mind the baby; feeling bored, I began to turn over the leaves of a book belonging to my stepfather—"The Memoirs of a Doctor," by Dumas Père—and between the pages I came across two notes, one for ten roubles and the other for one rouble. I could not understand the book, so I shut it up; then it suddenly dawned upon me that if I had a rouble I could buy not only the Bible, but also the book about Robinson. That such a book existed I had learned at school not long before this. One frosty day in recreation time, I was telling the boys a fairy-story, when one of them observed in a tone of contempt:

"Fairy-tales are bosh! 'Robinson' is what I like. It is a true story."

Finding several other boys who had read "Robinson" and were full of its praises, I felt offended at their not liking grandmother's stories, and made up my mind to read "Robinson" for myself, so that I should be able to tell them it was "bosh!"

The next day I brought the Bible and two torn vòlumes of Andersen's fairy-tales to school, together with three pounds of white bread and a pound of sausages. In the little dark shop by the wall of Vladinursk Church there had also been a "Robinson"—a thin little book with a yellow cover, and a picture of a

bearded man in a fur nightcap, with the skin of a wild beast over his shoulders, on the front page; but I did not like the look of it. Even the exterior of the fairy-tales was pleasing, in spite of their being torn.

In the long playtime I distributed the bread and sausages amongst the boys, and we began to read that wonderful story "The Nightingale," which took all our hearts by storm.

"In China all the people are Chinese, and even the Emperor is a Chinaman"—I remember how pleasantly this phrase struck me with its simple, joyful, smiling music. There were many other points about the story too which were wonderfully good.

But I was not to be allowed to read "The Nightingale" in school. There was not time enough, for when I returned home mother, who was standing before the fire holding a frying-pan in which she had been cooking some eggs, asked me in a strange, subdued voice:

"Did you take that rouble?"

"Yes, I took it—out of that book there."

She gave me a sound beating with the frying-pan, and took away Andersen's book and hid it somewhere so that I could never find it again, which was a far worse punishment to me than the beating.

I did not go to school for several days, and during that time my stepfather must have told one of his

friends about my exploit, who told his children, who carried the story to school, and when I went back I was met with the new cry "Thief!"

It was a brief and clear description, but it did not happen to be a true one, seeing that I had not attempted to conceal the fact that it was I who had taken the rouble. I tried to explain this, but they did not believe me; and when I went home I told mother that I was not going to school any more.

Sitting by the window, again pregnant, with a gray face and distraught, weary eyes, she was feeding my brother Sascha, and she stared at me with her mouth open, like a fish.

"You are wrong," she said quietly. "No one could possibly know that you took the rouble."

"Come yourself and ask them."

"You must have chattered about it yourself. Confess now—you told it yourself? Take care, for I shall find out for myself to-morrow who spread that story in school."

I gave her the name of the pupil. Her face wrinkled pitifully and her tears began to fall.

I went away to the kitchen and lay down on my bed, which consisted of a box behind the stove. I lay there and listened to my mother wailing:

"My God! My God!"

Not being able to bear the disgusting smell of greasy

cloths being dried any longer, I rose and went out to the yard; but mother called after me:

"Where are you going to? Where are you going? Come here to me!"

Then we sat on the floor; and Sascha lay on mother's knees, and taking hold of the buttons of her dress bobbed his head and said "boovooga," which was his way of saying "poogorka" (button).

I sat pressed to mother's side, and she said, kissing me:

"We . . . are poor, and every kopeck . . . every kopeck . . ."

But she never finished what she began to say, pressing me with her hot arm.

"What trash—trash!" she exclaimed suddenly, using a word I had heard her use before.

Sascha repeated:

"T'ash!"

He was a queer little boy; clumsily formed, with a large head, he looked around on everything with his beautiful dark blue eyes, smiling quietly, exactly as if he were expecting some one. He began to talk unusually early, and lived in a perpetual state of quiet happiness. He was a weakly child, and could hardly crawl about; and he was always very pleased to see me, and used to ask to be taken up in my arms, and loved to crush my ears in his soft little fingers, which always,

somehow, smelled of violets. He died unexpectedly, without having been ill at all; in the morning he was quietly happy as usual, and in the evening, when the bells were ringing for vespers, he was laid out upon the table. This happened soon after the birth of the second child, Nikolai. Mother had done as she had promised, and matters were put right for me at school, but I was soon involved in another scrape.

One day, at the time of evening tea, I was coming into the kitchen from the yard when I heard a distressful cry from mother:

"Eugen, I beg you, I beg—!"

"Non—sense!" said my stepfather.

"But you are going to her—I know it!"

"We—ll?"

For some seconds they were both silent; then mother said, coughing:

"What vile trash you are!"

I heard him strike her, and rushing into the room I saw that mother, who had fallen on to her knees, was resting her back and elbows against a chair, with her chest forward and her head thrown back, with a rattling in her throat, and terribly glittering eyes; while he, dressed in his best, with a new overcoat, was striking her in the chest with his long foot. I seized a knife from the table—a knife with a bone handle set in silver, which they used to cut bread with, the only

thing belonging to my father which remained to mother —I seized it and struck with all my force at my stepfather's side.

By good-luck mother was in time to push Maximov away, and the knife going sideways tore a wide hole in his overcoat, and only grazed his skin. My stepfather, gasping, rushed from the room holding his side, and mother seized me and lifted me up; then with a groan threw me on the floor. My stepfather took me away from her when he returned from the yard.

Late that evening, when, in spite of everything, he had gone out, mother came to me behind the stove, gently took me in her arms, kissed me, and said, weeping:

"Forgive me; it was my fault! Oh, my dear! How could you? . . . And with a knife . . . ?"

I remember with perfect clearness how I said to her that I would kill my stepfather and myself too. And I think I should have done it; at any rate I should have made the attempt. Even now I can see that contemptible long leg, in braided trousers, flung out into the air, and kicking a woman's breast. Many years later that unfortunate Maximov died before my eyes in a hospital. I had then become strangely attached to him, and I wept to see the light in his beautiful, roving eyes grow dim, and finally go out altogether; but even in that sad moment, although my heart was full

of a great grief, I could not forget that he had kicked my mother.

As I remember these oppressive horrors of our wild Russian life, I ask myself often whether it is worth while to speak of them. And then, with restored confidence, I answer myself—"It is worth while because it is actual, vile fact, which has not died out, even in these days—a fact which must be traced to its origin, and pulled up by the root from the memories, the souls of the people, and from our narrow, sordid lives."

And there is another and more important reason impelling me to describe these horrors. Although they are so disgusting, although they oppress us and crush many beautiful souls to death, yet the Russian is still so healthy and young in heart that he can and does rise above them. For in this amazing life of ours not only does the animal side of our nature flourish and grow fat, but with this animalism there has grown up, triumphant in spite of it, bright, healthful and creative —a type of humanity which inspires us to look forward to our regeneration, to the time when we shall all live peacefully and humanely.

CHAPTER XIII

ONCE more I found myself at grandfather's.

"Well, robber, what do you want?" were his words of greeting; and he accompanied them by rapping his fingers on the table. "I am not going to feed you any longer; let your grandmother do it."

"And so I will," said grandmother. "Ekh! what ill-luck. Just think of it."

"All right, feed him if you want to," cried grandfather; then growing calmer, he explained to me:

"She and I live quite separately now; we have nothing to do with each other."

Grandmother, sitting under the window, was making lace with swift movements; the shuttle snapped gaily, and the pillow, thickly sewn with copper pins, shone like a golden hedgehog in the spring sunlight. And grandmother herself—one would think she had been cast in copper—was unchanged. But grandfather was more wizened, more wrinkled; his sandy hair had grown gray, and his calm, self-important manner had given way to a fuming fussiness; his green eyes had grown dim, and had a suspicious expression. Laughingly, grandmother told me of the division of property

which had taken place between herself and grandfather; he had given her all the pots and pans and crockery ware, saying:

"Here is your little lot, and don't you ask me for anything else."

Thereupon he took all her old clothes and things, including a cloak of fox fur, and sold them for seven hundred roubles, and put the money out at interest to his Jew godson, the fruit merchant. Finally the malady of avarice fastened upon him, and he became lost to shame; he began to go about amongst his old acquaintances, his former colleagues, rich merchants, and complaining that he had been ruined by his children, would ask for money to help him in his poverty. He profited by their regard for him, for they gave to him generously—large sums in notes which he flourished boastfully in grandmother's face, taunting her, like a child:

"Look, fool, they won't give you a hundredth part of that."

The money which he obtained in this way he put out at interest with a new friend of his—a tall, bald furrier called, in the village, Khlist (a horsewhip), and his sister, a shopkeeper—a fat, red-cheeked woman with brown eyes, dark and sweet like virgin-honey.

All expenses in the house were carefully divided: one day the dinner was prepared by grandmother from

provisions bought with her own money; and the next day it was grandfather who provided the food—and his dinners were never as good as hers, for grandmother bought good meat while he bought such stuff as liver and lights and scraps of meat. They each had their own store of tea and sugar, but the tea was brewed in the same teapot, and grandfather would say anxiously:

"Wait! Wait a moment! . . . How much have you put in?"

Shaking the tea-leaves out on to his palm, he would carefully measure them out, saying:

"Your tea is finer than mine, so I ought to put in less, as mine is a large leaf."

He was very particular that grandmother should pour out his tea and her own both equally strong, and that she should fill her cup only as often as he filled his.

"What about the last one?" she asked, just before she had poured out all the tea.

Grandfather looked into the teapot and said:

"There 's plenty there—for the last one."

Even the oil for the image-lamp he bought separately—and this after fifty years of united labor!

These tricks of grandfather amused and disgusted me at the same time, but to grandmother they were simply funny.

"You be quiet!" she would say pacifyingly to me.

"What of it? He is an old, old man, and he is getting silly; that 's all. He must be eighty, or not far off it. Let him play the fool; what harm does it do any one? And I will do a little work for myself and you—never mind!"

I also began to earn a little money; in the holidays, early in the morning, I took a bag and went about the yards and streets collecting bones, rags, paper and nails. Rag-merchants would give two greevin (twenty kopecks) for a pood (forty pounds) of rags and paper, or iron, and ten or eight kopecks for a pood of bones. I did this work on week days after school too, and on Saturdays I sold articles at thirty kopecks or half a rouble each, and sometimes more if I was lucky. Grandmother took the money away from me and put it quickly into the pocket of her skirt, and praised me, looking down:

"There! Thank you, my darling. This will do for our food. . . . You have done very well."

One day I saw her holding five kopecks of mine in her hands, looking at them, and quietly crying; and one muddy tear hung from the tip of her spongy, pumicestone-like nose.

A more profitable game than rag-picking was the theft of logs and planks from the timber-yards on the banks of the Oka, or on the Island of Pesk, where, in fair time, iron was bought and sold in hastily built

booths. After the fairs the booths used to be taken down, but the poles and planks were stowed away in the boathouses, and remained there till close on the time of the spring floods. A small houseowner would give ten kopecks for a good plank, and it was possible to steal two a day. But for the success of the undertaking, bad weather was essential, when a snowstorm or heavy rains would drive the watchmen to hide themselves under cover.

I managed to pick up some friendly accomplices—one ten-year-old son of a Morduan beggar, Sanka Vyakhir, a kind, gentle boy always tranquilly happy; kinless Kostrom, lanky and lean, with tremendous black eyes, who in his thirteenth year was sent to a colony of young criminals for stealing a pair of doves; the little Tartar Khabi, a twelve-year-old "strong man," simple-minded and kind; blunt-nosed Yaz, the son of a graveyard watchman and grave-digger, a boy of eight, taciturn as a fish, and suffering from epilepsy; and the eldest of all was the son of a widowed dressmaker, Grishka Tchurka, a sensible, straightforward boy, who was terribly handy with his fists. We all lived in the same street.

Theft was not counted as a crime in our village; it had become a custom, and was practically the only means the half-starved natives had of getting a livelihood. Fairs lasting a month and a half would not

keep them for a whole year, and many respectable householders "did a little work on the river"—catching logs and planks which were borne along by the tide, and carrying them off separately or in small loads at a time; but the chief form this occupation took was that of thefts from barges, or in a general prowling up and down the Volga or Oka on the lookout for anything which was not properly secured. The grown-up people used to boast on Sundays of their successes, and the youngsters listened and learned.

In the springtime, during the spell of heat before the fair, when the village streets were full of drunken workmen, cabmen, and all classes of working folk, the village children used to rummage in their pockets. This was looked upon as legitimate business, and they carried it on under the very eyes of their elders. They stole his tools from the carpenter, the keys from the heedless cabman, the harness from the dray-horse, and the iron from the axles of the cart. But our little band did not engage in that sort of thing. Tchurka announced one day in a tone of decision:

"I am not going to steal. Mamka does not allow it."

"And I am afraid to," said Khabi.

Kostrom was possessed by an intense dislike for the little thieves; he pronounced the word "thieves" with

peculiar force, and when he saw strange children picking the pockets of tipsy men he drove them away, and if he happened to catch one of them he gave him a good beating. This large-eyed, unhappy-looking boy imagined himself to be grown-up; he walked with a peculiar gait, sideways, just like a porter, and tried to speak in a thick, gruff voice, and was very reserved and self-possessed, like an old man.

Vyakhir believed that to steal was to sin.

But to take planks and poles from Pesk, that was not accounted a sin; none of us were afraid of that, and we so ordered matters as to make it very easy to succeed. Some evening, when it was beginning to grow dark, or by day, if it was bad weather, Vyakhir and Yaz set out for Pesk, crossing the creek by the wet ice. They went openly, for the purpose of drawing on themselves the attention of the watchmen, while we four crossed over separately without being seen. While the watchmen, suspicious of Yaz and Vyakhir, were occupied in watching them, we betook ourselves to the boathouse, which we had fixed upon beforehand, chose something to carry off, and while our fleet-footed companions were teasing the watchmen, and luring them to pursuit, we made off home. Each one of us had a piece of string with a large nail, bent like a hook, at the end of it, which we fastened in the plank or pole,

and thus were able to drag it across the snow and ice. The watchmen hardly ever saw us, and if they did see us they were never able to overtake us.

When we had sold our plunder we divided the gains into six shares, which sometimes came to as much as five or seven kopecks each. On that money it was possible to live very comfortably for a day, but Vyakhir's mother beat him if he did not bring her something for a glass of brandy or a little drop of vodka. Kostrom was saving his money, dreaming of the establishment of a pigeon-hunt. The mother of Tchurka was ill, so he tried to work as much as possible. Khabi also saved his money, with the object of returning to his native town, whence he had been brought by his uncle who had been drowned at Nijni soon after his arrival. Khabi had forgotten what the town was called; all he remembered was that it stood on the Kama, close by the Volga. For some reason we always made fun of this town, and we used to tease the cross-eyed Tartar by singing:

"On the Kama a town there is,
But nobody knows where it is!
Our hands to it will never reach,
Our feet to find it we cannot teach."

At first Khabi used to get angry with us, but one day Vyakhir said to him in his cooing voice, which justified his nickname:

"What is the matter with you? Surely you are not angry with your comrades."

The Tartar was ashamed of himself, and after that he used to join us in singing about the town on the Kama.

But all the same we preferred picking up rags and bones to stealing planks. The former was particularly interesting in the springtime, when the snow had melted, and after the rain had washed the street pavements clean. There, by the place where the fair was held, we could always pick up plenty of nails and pieces of iron in the gutter, and occasionally we found copper and silver coins; but to propitiate the watchman, so that he would not chase us away or seize our sacks, we had to give him a few kopecks or make profound obeisances to him. But we found it no easy task to get money. Nevertheless, we got on very well together, and though we sometimes disputed a little amongst ourselves, I do not remember that we ever had one serious quarrel.

Our peacemaker was Vyakhir, who always had some simple words ready, exactly suited to the occasion, which astonished us and put us to shame. He uttered them himself in a tone of astonishment. Yaz's spiteful sallies neither offended nor upset him; in his opinion everything bad was unnecessary, and he would reject it calmly and convincingly.

"Well, what is the use of it?" he would ask, and we saw clearly that it was no use.

He called his mother "my Morduan," and we did not laugh at him.

"My Morduan rolled home tipsy again last evening," he would tell us gaily, flashing his round, gold-colored eyes. "She kept the door open, and sat on the step and sang—like a hen."

"What did she sing?" asked Tchurka, who liked to be precise.

Vyakhir, slapping his hands on his knees, reproduced his mother's song in a thin voice:

"Shepherd, tap thy window small,
Whilst we run about the mall;
Tap, tap again, quick bird of night,
With piping music, out of sight,
On the village cast thy spell."

He knew many passionate songs like this, and sang them very well.

"Yes," he continued, "so she went to sleep on the doorstep, and the room got so cold I was shivering from head to foot, and got nearly frozen to death; but she was too heavy for me to drag her in. I said to her this morning, 'What do you mean by getting so dreadfully drunk?' 'Oh,' she said, 'it is all right. Bear with me a little longer. I shall soon be dead.'

"She will soon be dead," repeated Tchurka, in a serious tone. "She is already dropsical."

"Would you be sorry?" I asked.

"Of course I should," exclaimed Vyakhir, astonished. "She is all right with me, you know."

And all of us, although we knew that the Morduan beat Vyakhir continually, believed that she was "all right," and sometimes even, when we had had a bad day, Tchurka would suggest:

"Let us put our kopecks together to buy Vyakhir's mother some brandy, or she will beat him."

The only ones in our company who could read and write were Tchurka and I. Vyakhir greatly envied us, and would murmur, as he took himself by his pointed, mouse-like ears:

"As soon as my Morduan is buried I shall go to school too. I shall go on my knees to the teacher and beg him to take me, and when I have finished learning I will go as gardener to the Archbishop, or perhaps to the Emperor himself."

In the spring the Morduan, in company with an old man, who was a collector for a church building-fund, and a bottle of vodka, was crushed by the fall of a wood-stack; they took the woman to the hospital, and practical Tchurka said to Vyakhir:

"Come and live with me, and my mother will teach you to read and write."

And in a very short time Vyakhir, holding his head high, could read the inscription: "Grocery Store," only he read "Balakeinia," and Tchurka corrected him:

"Bakaleinia, my good soul."

"I know—but the letters jump about so. They jump because they are pleased that they are being read."

He surprised us all, and made us laugh very much by his love of trees and grass. The soil of the village was sandy and vegetation was scanty—in some of the yards stood a miserable willow tree, or some straggling elder bushes, or a few gray, dry blades of grass hid themselves timidly under a fence—but if one of us sat on them, Vyakhir would cry angrily:

"Why must you sit on the grass? Why don't you sit on the gravel? It is all the same to you, is n't it?"

In his opinion there was no sense in breaking off branches from the willow, or plucking elder flowers, or cutting weeping willow twigs on the banks of the Oka; he always expressed great surprise when we did this, shrugged his shoulders, and spread out his hands:

"Why on earth do you want to break everything? Look what you have done, you devils!" And before his astonishment we were ashamed.

We had contrived a very merry game for Saturdays, and we were preparing for it all the week by collecting all the troddendown bast shoes we could

find and storing them in convenient corners. Then on Saturday evening when the Tartar porters came home from the Siberian ports, we took up a position at the cross-roads and pelted the Tartars with shoes.

At first this used to irritate them, and they ran after us, and abused us; but the game soon began to interest them, and knowing what they might expect they appeared on the field of battle also armed with a quantity of bast shoes, and what is more, they found out where we kept our war materials and stole them. We made a complaint about this—"It is not playing the game!" Then they divided the shoes, giving us half, and the fight began. Generally they drew themselves up in an open place, in the middle of the cross-roads, and with yells we ran round them, hurling the shoes. They also yelled, and laughed loud enough to deafen any one when one of us buried his head in the sand, having been thrown down by a shoe adroitly hurled under his feet.

This game would be carried on with zest for a long time, sometimes till it was nearly dark; and the inhabitants used to gather round, or watch us from corners, and grumble, because they thought it was the right thing to do. The dusty shoes flew about like crows in the damp air; sometimes one of us was hit hard, but the pleasure of the game was greater than pain or injury.

The Tartars were not less keen on it than we were; often when we had finished playing we went with them to an eating-house where they fed us with a special sweet kind of preserve made with fruit, and after supper we drank thick, brick-colored tea, with sweetmeats. We liked these people, whose strength matched their great size; there was something about them so childlike and transparent. The points which most struck me about them were their meekness, their unwavering good-nature, and their grave, impressive respect for each other.

They all laughed so heartily that the tears ran down their faces; and one of them, a native of Kassimov, with a broken nose, was a man renowned for his strength. One day he carried, from a barge which was at some distance from the shore, a bell weighing twenty-seven poods, and he roared out laughing as he cried: "Voo! Voo!"

One day he made Vyakhir sit on the palm of his hand, and lifting him on high, he said:

"Look where you are living now, right up in the sky."

In bad weather we used to assemble at Yaz's home, in the burial-ground, where his father's lodge was. This father was an individual with hoisted bones, long arms, and a small head; mud-colored hair grew on his face. His head looked like a burdock set on his long,

thin neck, as on a stalk. He had a delightful way of half closing his yellow eyes and muttering rapidly:

"God give us rest. Ouch!"

We bought three zolotniks of tea, eight portions of sugar, some bread, and, of course, a portion of vodka for Yaz's father, who was sternly ordered about by Tchurka:

"Good for nothing peasant, get the samovar ready."

The peasant laughed and prepared the tin samovar; and while we discussed business as we waited for tea to be ready, he gave us good advice:

"Look here! The day after to-morrow is the month's mind of Trusov, and there will be some feasting going on there. . . . There 's a place to pick up bones."

"The cook collects all the bones at Trusov's," observed Tchurka, who knew everything.

Vyakhir said dreamily, as he looked out of the window on the graveyard:

"We shall soon be able to go out to the woods."

Yaz was always silent, looking at us all expressively with his sad eyes. In silence he showed us his toys—wooden soldiers which he had found in a rubbish pit, horses without legs, pieces of copper, and buttons.

His father set the table with cups and saucers of various patterns, and brought in the samovar. Kos-

trom sat down to pour out tea, and he, when he had drunk his vodka, climbed on the stove, and stretching out his long neck, surveyed us with vinous eyes, and muttered:

"Ouch! So you must take your ease, as if you were not little boys at all, eh? Ach! thieves . . . God give us rest!"

Vyakhir said to him:

"We are not thieves at all."

"Well—little thieves then."

If Yaz's father became too tiresome, Tchurka cried angrily:

"Be quiet, you trashy peasant!"

Vyakhir, Tchurka and I could not bear to hear the man counting up the number of houses which contained people in ill-health, or trying to guess how many of the villagers would die soon; he spoke so calculatingly and pitilessly, and seeing that what he said was objectionable to us, he purposely teased and tormented us:

"Oh, so you are afraid, young masters? Well, well! And before long a certain stout person will die—ekh! And long may he rot in his grave!"

We tried to stop him, but he would not leave off.

"And, you know, you 've got to die too; you can't live long in this cesspool!"

"Well," said Vyakhir, "that 's all right; and when we die they will make angels of us."

"Yo—u?" exclaimed Yaz's father, catching his breath in amazement. "You? Angels?"

He chuckled, and then began to tease us again by telling us disgusting stories about dead people.

But sometimes this man began to talk in a murmur, lowering his voice strangely:

"Listen, children . . . wait a bit! The day before yesterday they buried a female . . . and I knew her history, children. . . . What do you think the woman was?"

He often spoke about women, and always obscenely; yet there was something appealing and plaintive about his stories—he invited us to share his thoughts, as it were—and we listened to him attentively. He spoke in an ignorant and unintelligent manner, frequently interrupting his speech by questions; but his stories always left some disturbing splinters or fragments in one's memory.

"They ask her: 'Who set the place on fire?' 'I did!' 'How can that be, foolish woman, when you were not at home that night, but lying ill in the hospital?' 'I set the place on fire.' That 's the way she kept on. . . . Why? Ouch! God give us rest."

He knew the life story of nearly every female inhabitant of the place who had been buried by him in that bare, melancholy graveyard, and it seemed as if he were opening the doors of houses, which we entered,

and saw how the occupiers lived; and it made us feel serious and important. He would have gone on talking all night till the morning apparently, but as soon as the lodge window grew cloudy, and the twilight closed in upon it, Tchurka rose from the table and said:

"I am going home, or Mamka will be frightened. Who is coming with me?"

We all went away then. Yaz conducted us to the fence, closed the gate after us, and pressing his dark, bony face against the grating, said in a thick voice:

"Good-by."

We called out "Good-by" to him too. It was always hard to leave him in the graveyard. Kostrom said one day, looking back:

"We shall come and ask for him one day—and he will be dead."

"Yaz has a worse life than any of us," Tchurka said frequently; but Vyakhir always rejoined:

"We don't have a bad time—any of us!"

And when I look back I see that we did not have a bad time. That independent life so full of contrasts was very attractive to me, and so were my comrades, who inspired me with a desire to be always doing them a good turn.

My life at school had again become hard; the pupils nicknamed me "The Ragman" and "The Tramp,"

and one day, after a quarrel, they told the teacher that I smelt like a drain, and that they could not sit beside me. I remember how deeply this accusation cut me, and how hard it was for me to go to school after it. The complaint had been made up out of malice. I washed very thoroughly every morning, and I never went to school in the clothes I wore when I was collecting rags.

However, in the end I passed the examination for the third class, and received as prizes bound copies of the Gospels and the "Fables of Krilov," and another book unbound which bore the unintelligible title of "Fata-Morgana"; they also gave me some sort of laudatory certificates. When I took my presents home, grandfather was delighted, and announced his intention of taking the books away from me and locking them up in his box. But grandmother had been lying ill for several days, penniless, and grandfather continually sighed and squeaked out: "You will eat me out of house and home. Ugh! *You!*" so I took the books to a little shop, where I sold them for fifty-five kopecks, and gave the money to grandmother; as to the certificates I spoiled them by scribbling over them, and then handed them to grandfather, who took them without turning them over, and so put them away, without noticing the mischief I had done, but I paid for it later on.

As school had broken up I began to live in the streets once more, and I found it better than ever.

It was in the middle of spring, and money was earned easily; on Sundays the whole company of us went out into the fields, or into the woods, where the foliage was fresh and young, early in the morning, and did not return till late in the evening, pleasantly tired, and drawn together closer than ever.

But this form of existence did not last long. My stepfather, dismissed for getting into debt, had disappeared again, and mother came back to grandfather, with my little brother Nikolai, and I had to be nurse, for grandmother had gone to live at the house of a rich merchant in the town, where she worked at stitching shrouds.

Mother was so weak and anemic that she could hardly walk, and she had a terrible expression in her eyes as she looked about her. My brother was scrofulous, and covered with painful ulcers, and so weak that he could not even cry aloud and only whimpered when he was hungry. When he had been fed he slumbered, breathing with a strange sound like the soft mewing of a kitten.

Observing him attentively, grandfather said:

"He ought to have plenty of good food; but I have not got enough to feed you all."

Mother, sitting on the bed in the corner, sighed, and said in a hoarse voice:

"He does not want much."

"A little for one and a little for another soon mounts up."

He waved his hand as he turned to me:

"Nikolai must be kept out in the sun—in some sand."

I dragged out a sack of clean sand, turned it out in a heap in a place where the sun was full on it, and buried my brother in it up to his neck, as grandfather told me. The little boy loved sitting in the sand; he cooed sweetly, and flashed his bright eyes upon me —extraordinary eyes they were, without whites, just blue pupils surrounded by brilliant rings.

I became attached to my little brother at once. It seemed to me that he understood all my thoughts as I lay beside him on the sand under the window, whence the sound of grandfather's shrill voice proceeded:

"If he dies—and he won't have much difficulty about it—you will have a chance to live."

Mother answered by a long fit of coughing.

Getting his hands free, the little boy held them out to me, shaking his small white head; he had very little hair, and what there was was almost gray, and his tiny face had an old and wise expression. If a hen or a

cat came near us Kolai would gaze at it for a long time, then he would look at me and smile almost significantly. That smile of his disturbed me. Was it possible that he felt that I found it dull being with him, and was longing to run out to the street and leave him there?

The yard was small, close, and dirty; from the gate were built a succession of sheds and cellars ending at the washhouse. All the roofs were made of pieces of old boats—logs, boards, and damp bits of wood which had been secured by the inhabitants of the neighborhood when the ice was breaking on the Oka, or at flood-time—and the whole yard was an unsightly conglomeration of heaps of wood of all sorts, which, being saturated with water, sweated in the sun and emitted an intensified odor of rottenness.

Next door there was a slaughter-house for the smaller kind of cattle, and almost every morning could be heard the bellowing of calves and the bleating of sheep, and the smell of blood became so strong sometimes that it seemed to me that it hovered in the air in the shape of a transparent, purple net.

When the animals bellowed as the butt-end of the ax struck them between the horns, Kolai would blink and blow out his lips, as if he wanted to imitate the sound; but all he could do was to breathe:

"Phoo . . ."

At midday grandfather, putting his head out of the window, would call:

"Dinner!"

He used to feed the child himself, holding him on his knees, pressing potatoes and bread into Kolai's mouth, and smearing them all over his thin lips and pointed chin. When he had given him a little food grandfather would lift up the little boy's shirt, poke his swollen stomach with his fingers, and debate with himself aloud:

"Will that do? Or must I give him some more?"

Then my mother's voice would be heard, proceeding from her dark corner:

"Look at him! He is reaching for the bread."

"Stupid child! How can he possibly know how much he ought to eat?" And again he gave Kolai something to chew.

I used to feel ashamed when I looked on at this feeding business; a lump seemed to rise in my throat and make me feel sick.

"That will do," grandfather would say, at length. "Take him to his mother."

I took Kolai; he wailed and stretched his hands out to the table. Mother, raising herself with difficulty, came to meet me, holding out her hideously dry, fleshless arms, so long and thin—just like branches broken off a Christmas-tree.

She had become almost dumb, hardly ever uttering a word in that passionate voice of hers, but lying in silence all day long in her corner—slowly dying. That she was dying I felt, I knew—yes. And grandfather spoke too often, in his tedious way, of death, especially in the evening, when it grew dark in the yard, and a smell of rottenness, warm and woolly, like a sheep's fleece, crept in at the window.

Grandfather's bed stood in the front corner, almost under the image, and he used to lie there with his head towards it and the window, and mutter for a long time in the darkness:

"Well—the time has come for us to die. How shall we stand before our God? What shall we say to Him? All our life we have been struggling. What have we done? And with what object have we done it?"

I slept on the floor between the stove and the window; I had not enough room, so I had to put my feet in the oven, and the cockroaches used to tickle them. This corner afforded me not a little malicious enjoyment, for grandfather was continually breaking the window with the end of the oven-rake, or the poker, during his cooking operations; and it was very comical to see, and very strange, I thought, that any one so clever as grandfather should not think of cutting down the rake.

One day when there was something boiling in a pot on the fire he was in a hurry, and he used the rake so carelessly that he broke the window-frame, two panes of glass, and upset the saucepan on the hearth and broke it. The old man was in such a rage that he sat on the floor and cried.

"O Lord! O Lord!"

That day, when he had gone out, I took a bread knife and cut the oven-rake down to a quarter or a third of its size; but when grandfather saw what I had done, he scolded me:

"Cursed devil! It ought to have been sawn through with a saw. We might have made rolling-pins out of the end, and sold them, you devil's spawn!"

Throwing his arms about wildly, he ran out of the door, and mother said:

"You ought not to have meddled . . ."

She died one Sunday in August about midday. My stepfather had only just returned from his travels, and had obtained a post somewhere. Grandmother had taken Kolai to him—to a newly done-up flat near the station, and mother was to be carried there in a few days.

In the morning of the day of her death she said to me in a low but a lighter and clearer voice than I had heard from her lately:

"Go to Eugen Vassilev, and ask him to come to me."

Lifting herself up in bed by pressing her hands against the wall, she added:

"Run—quickly!"

I thought she was smiling, and that there was a new light in her eyes.

My stepfather was at Mass, and grandmother sent me to get some snuff for her; there was no prepared snuff at hand, so I had to wait while the shopkeeper got it, then I took it back to grandmother.

When I returned to grandfather's, mother was sitting at the table dressed in a clean, lilac-colored frock, with her hair prettily dressed, and looking as splendid as she used to look.

"You are feeling better?" I asked, with a feeling of inexplicable fear.

Looking at me fixedly, she said:

"Come here! Where have you been? Eh?"

Before I had time to reply, she seized me by the hair, and grasping in her other hand a long, flexible knife, made out of a saw, she flourished it several times and struck me with the flat of it. It slipped from her hands to the floor.

"Pick it up and give it to me. . . ."

I picked up the knife and threw it on the table, and mother pushed me away from her. I sat on the ledge

of the stove and watched her movements in a state of terror.

Rising from the chair she slowly made her way towards her own corner, lay down on the bed, and wiped her perspiring face with a handkerchief. Her hands moved uncertainly; twice she missed her face and touched the pillow instead.

"Give me some water. . . ."

I scooped some water out of a pail with a cup, and lifting her head with difficulty, she drank a little. Then she pushed my hand away with her cold hand, and drew a deep breath. Then after looking at the corner where the icon was, she turned her eyes on me, moved her lips as if she were smiling, and slowly let her long lashes droop over her eyes. Her elbows were pressed closely against her sides, and her hands, on which the fingers were weakly twitching, crept about her chest, moving towards her throat. A shadow fell upon her face, invading every part of it, staining the skin yellow, sharpening the nose. Her mouth was open as if she were amazed at something, but her breathing was not audible. I stood, for how long I do not know, by my mother's bedside, with the cup in my hand, watching her face grow frozen and gray.

When grandfather came in I said to him:

"Mother is dead."

He glanced at the bed.

"Why are you telling lies?"

He went to the stove and took out the pie, rattling the dampers deafeningly.

I looked at him, knowing that mother was dead, and waiting for him to find it out.

My stepfather came in dressed in a sailor's pea-jacket, with a white cap. He noiselessly picked up a chair and took it over to mother's bed, when suddenly he let it fall with a crash to the floor and cried in a loud voice, like a trumpet:

"Yes—she is dead! Look!"

Grandfather, with wide-open eyes, softly moved away from the stove with the damper in his hand, stumbling like a blind man.

. . . . . .

A few days after my mother's funeral, grandfather said to me:

"Now, Lexei—you must not hang round my neck. There is no room for you here. You will have to go out into the world."

And so I went out into the world.

THE END

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